

9 x Reader Scenarios

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9 x Reader Scenarios

by [Kerriathechosen1](#)

Summary

For all who love the movie "9"! This is sort of a companion story to my Quotev quiz, "Your Life As A Stitchpunk"! I hope you all like it! Please also check out my 9 quizzes!

The cover image for this on my Quotev account is by Stitch Punk Warrior on Quotev! Go check out their awesome art!

This was a request by destinycooley13 on Quotev! :)

I {How You Meet}

1:

1 was sitting calmly on his throne, impatient, as he waited for 7 and 9 to get to their point. They were clearly hiding something in the container of the pulley that led up to what was considered his quarters. 8 was still holding the container stable in the air, hand on the rope, but keeping it out of 1's sight, as 7 and 9 explained what they'd found in the emptiness. They knew 1 didn't like surprises, but they carried on anyway.

"- and, when we looked inside, we found another one of us," 9 finished. 1's eyes flickered with disbelief.

"That can not be. You said it yourself -- The Scientist was dead when you awoke. He could not have made another."

"Well, argue against this," 7 remarked, voice carrying a tone of smug satisfaction as she gestured down to 8 to lift it up the rest of the way. The container moved up into view, then stopped with a jolt, surprising you just a little bit, as you wobbled with the platform. 1's naturally squinted eyes widened, growing rounder as he gazed upon you.

You hadn't been expecting this. With the way 7 had talked about 1, you had assumed he would be extremely rigid and undeterred, but although he seemed a bit arrogant, the look in his eyes told you there was more to it. A spark of curiosity fermented itself in your soul, and you instinctively wanted to know more about him.

He was shocked that another stitchpunk could exist after 9. It was evident this surprise would be with him for a while, as he walked up to you and closely examined your body for details that would hint at the timeframe of your existence.

He murmured, "... It is... puzzling," as he stopped directly in front of you. Stumped, he shook his head and took a step back so that he could look you in the eyes. You noticed what he was doing, as you were a very observant person; he was searching for potential within you. And he must have found something, for he seemed to be satisfied rather than annoyed.

"We will have to discuss this at further length... For now, take her around the sanctuary, and I suppose she will have to share a bed with 7 until 2 builds another. I must reflect on this for a night."

7 seemed satisfied with the turn-out. 9, on the other hand, was looking at 1 in a rather doubtful manner. 8 began to work the pulley to bring you all back down.

You turned to 1, ensured that he was gazing your way, and sent him a light smile, taking him by surprise. From what you could tell, he wasn't smiled at very often, and he certainly didn't smile very much himself. You decided that you would be the one to change that.

2:

Rubble crumbled in the distance. You slunk into the shadowy protection of a cylindrical can in silence. The dusky sky above was lifeless and foreboding, and the wind was so light that it made no sound. The dismal surroundings in which you were hiding didn't frighten you, as you'd grown accustomed to it. But the slightest sound tipped you off that something was wrong. You pulled out a Kunai that you'd had strapped to your back with a rubber band, and listened intently for a second noise.

You heard it again, closer than before. Footsteps, headed your way. Not those of a machine, though. It was that of a creature like you.

You hadn't ever seen another creature like you. Nervous, but also confident in your ability to protect yourself, you peeped out of the can and took sight of a rag doll, facing the ground away from you, chuckling and kicking some scrap around with his right foot. He held a cane in one hand, and was touching some strange contraption on his head with the other. He had a metal plate on the back of his head, and he looked frail. Harmless. Not an enemy.

You were at a loss whether or not to say anything. His body began to turn towards you, so you hid back inside the can.

His footsteps came closer, and you gripped your Kunai tighter. Finally, he stepped right beside the can, and he turned to face you.

He screamed, and jumped backwards, falling to the ground. You didn't move, giving him time to calm himself and get back to his feet. His eyes visibly brightened, and he moved closer to you, taking you by surprise. He gently grabbed your hands with his, and whispered, "So there is another..."

The pure joy and excitement in his eyes at your meager existence astonished you. You were a bit unnerved by how close he was to you, and tried to take a step back to remove yourself from the situation.

He took a step back, releasing both of your hands, but still holding one out to you, kindly.

"Please come with me. I'd like to show you what you've been missing all this time."

Still a bit embarrassed, you nodded silently, and followed him quietly outside of the can. You weren't sure what awaited you wherever you were going, but your curiosity wouldn't let you just ignore it.

Bravely, you took a chance, and accepted companionship for the first time in your existence.

3:

The old abandoned site had a mystical beauty to it. Tall, fancy black gates stood half-opened at the entrance, and statues lined the area inside, facing the stitchpunks as they entered. You followed 7 as she made her way toward the library's entrance, up the stone stairs and into the building.

It was quiet, and peaceful. But you didn't let your guard down once. It was a tough world, and you had to be prepared at all times.

"3! 4!" The paler stitchpunk gazed about the room with a relaxed expression upon her face.

"Come on out."

She was met with silence. You weren't surprised. It wasn't as if you were particularly welcoming, or that you had a calming persona. Of course they wouldn't want to leave their places of hiding.

"It's fine," You stated solemnly. 7 frowned at you, but you continued. "They don't have to come out. They know I'm here."

Hiding behind a book, 3 and 4 listened quietly, flashing their thoughts at one another behind flickering eyes. It didn't seem to be an enemy, but... They sensed in you a strength similar to 8's, stronger than 7's. Your overpowering quietness was also a cause for concern.

"She'll be living with us for a while," 7 finally spoke. She gestured toward you. "So we'll be more protected from any Beasts."

3 looked to 4, his eyes flashing his command, to be careful. 4 flashed back in compliance.

They stepped out, fairly quickly. 3 moved out first, and then 4 followed on the other side.

They skipped forward a few steps, out in the open, then stopped. 4 stood slightly behind his

twin, who watched you carefully. You knew that he didn't trust you, and you didn't mind. It just meant he was being careful. You had the blade of a pair of scissors on your back, after all, and you weren't going to just fake a smile. But, whether or not they trusted you, you had promised to watch over them. You didn't have anything better to do, and... well, it was the right thing to do. 7 shouldn't have had to take care of them herself.

Deciding not to make it awkward for them, you nodded a silent hello, and then turned your back on them. "I'll go out and see if I can find anything useful. Get adjusted to my surroundings."

"All right," 7 replied unhappily, as you began to walk out.

The twins continued to watch you silently as you left. 3 shivered upon seeing the blade on your back. It was a spitting image of 8.

4:

"This place is beautiful," You breathed out, examining the tall, carefully-constructed statues on your way into the library.

"I... guess it is," 7 replied, now gazing up at them herself, as if for the first time. She then paused, as if she'd heard something, and gripped your arm. "Come on. It's safer in there."

"All right!" You were grinning. You loved to read, and the idea of absorbing new information excited you. You skipped carelessly toward the entrance, whereas 7 moved swiftly, cautiously looking all around in the case of anyone watching you. But nothing showed up, and soon you were inside.

"Woooooow," You gawked at the number of books there were. So much information for you to absorb... So many interesting facts and details you could finally know. You'd never been to a library before, but you knew all about the hundreds of books it was to contain. You'd never be able to read it all, and that thrilled you to no end.

Still, you calmed yourself down upon feeling the air of the room. It was silent, shadowy, and eery.

"... It's kind of creepy in here," You admitted loudly. 7 shushed you, then face-palmed. There was danger in making noise, but you didn't fear it. Even weaponless, you didn't fear much anything. It both amazed and worried her at the same time.

Two heads popped out from opposite sides of a book. They were two other stitchpunks, with almost identical designs, both with dark blue goods, light blue bodies, and vertical stripes.

The only visible differences were the 3 on the right-hand side of the one's body, and the 4 on the left-hand side of the other's. They turned to each other, and their eyes flashed in the others' eyes. You had no idea what they were doing, at first, but assumed they were communicating. And, they were -- 3 was sending the signal that it was all right to approach you, because you didn't seem to be dangerous.

They waited a few moments, then hid behind 7, watching you with attentiveness, but not with fear.

You blinked at them. "What was that?!"

"They can't speak. It's how they communicate." 7 smiled at them, and they moved up to you, poking and prodding you all over your body and flickering their eyes at you. You gasped as you were poked in the stomach. 7 laughed.

You were now no longer startled, as 4 picked up your hand and began to examine it. You shocked them all by grabbed him by the shoulders, and shaking him.

"You are just so darn cute!!!" You squealed. 4 quickly pulled away, and he and 3 hid behind 7 once more, 4 looking slightly flustered. "So, why are they here?"

"They came here to seek the truth. To find answers." She glanced at 4, saw his expression, and smiled wider. "Just like you."

"I see..." Your mind was working now, as you faced the entirety of the library, and all of its hidden knowledge, just dying to be released. Energized once again, you called out to the twins. "All right! I want you to show me something! Anything! The most interesting thing you've found here!"

Overwhelmed, the two of them quickly faced each other and began blinking wildly, trying to communicate a set idea. Finally, they seemed to reach an agreement, and they turned and ran off somewhere.

Excitedly, you chased after them, eager to find out more about your world.

5:

5 squinted through the telescope, bored, but unwilling to go through 1's tiresome speech if he was found slacking off. It was the same thing, day after day. Honestly, was it really necessary?

He knew it was. He knew it was safe here because they kept watch, but still, it didn't make him any more eager to do so.

5 turned around and adjusted the telescope, looking out in the opposite direction. He fiddled with his fingers as he stared out into the Emptiness tiredly, knowing that it would all be for nothing.

Movement.

5 blinked out of his one remaining eye, backing out from the telescope. He leaned back in and squinted again.

Yes, it was definitely something coming toward the Sanctuary. Just a tiny dot, but if he fixed the focus...

Suddenly, a stitchpunk came into view. 5 tried to identify it, but realized with shock that he didn't recognize it. It certainly wasn't any of them. That meant... there was a tenth?!

Quickly he gathered the attention of 1 and 8. Shaken by this announcement, they grabbed 2, and the three of them went out to meet the new stitchpunk. 1 commanded 5 to remain at his post, and he complied, disheartened. Someone new was arriving, and he couldn't even go out to meet them? He felt excited, curious as to who this being was, and he wanted nothing more than to go down and welcome you. Already he felt a strong bond, as the first one to set his eyes on you.

Some time later, he found that he was being visited. 2 had brought you up to introduce you to 5.

Smiling widely, you waved at him, not even flinching or dropping your smile in surprise at the sight of his missing eye. "Hi, nice to meet you!"

"Uh... y-yeah. Nice to meet you..." He was startled by your bright greeting.

"So you like to invent things?" You stepped up close to him and began to look about the watchtower, and some of the gadgets he had, vaguely interested. "I wish I was smart enough to know how to make this." You picked up his makeshift crossbow. "Do you have to use this often? It's kind of heavy..."

5 quickly grabbed it from you in case you accidentally hurt yourself with it, and showed you how he carried it and used it. You thought it was a very cool weapon, and you announced it cheerfully. You weren't one to keep your thoughts to yourself.

5 was charmed by your cute, bubbly, quirky way of talking. You didn't seem to want to stop, or seem to understand that there were things that needed to be done still. 2 finally reminded

you that he needed to finish giving you your tour, and 5 needed to focus on keeping watch. You frowned, but nodded.

2 noticed 5's shoulders sag as well. "... You know what, let's switch. You've been on watch duty for a while now, haven't you, 5?" He saw 5's mood do a complete 180°. "How would you feel about taking my place?"

"Y-Yeah, sure!" Energized, he hurried to grab his belongings, and led the way back down, eagerly conversing with you about the next stop of your tour.

6:

You walked into 1's quarters, beside 8. He didn't push you like he did the others; he sensed that you would retaliate, and though he didn't exactly fear you, he was wary. You hadn't given up your weapons, and had threatened to use them on him if he tried to take them. 8 was confused, as you didn't seem to feel threatened by his knife. However, you'd at least volunteered to leave your throwing blades back with 7, who'd brought you here to meet the others. A bit grumpy about your indifference to him, though, he took out his knife and spun it around in a casual, intimidating way, and decided to wait and see what 1 thought of you. 1 told you the story of how they'd all survived the war, and how they'd arrived at the Sanctuary. You listened quietly, respectfully, but when he started to show his arrogance, you began to show your disagreement.

"We are safe here, because of the way that I rule.

"You're using power to do what you please," You argued. "It's not safe as long as you're letting him wave that knife around, especially if he's the only one allowed a weapon like that."

"Silence!" His eyes seemed to shrivel up into an almost-straight line. "This is how we keep peace."

"That's a dictatorship. Can it be peaceful if there's no free will? Where is the justice in taking away one's ability to protect themselves?"

"We have rules for a reason! Without rules, we would already be made into scrap metal!"

"You misjudge the potential of the weak," You growled.

Just then, an object clattered to the floor. You snapped your head to the side and caught the wild eyes of a small, crouched, striped stitchpunk, who quickly crawled back into hiding after picking up a small can. Jet-black ink had spilled out into a puddle on the floor.

"Who is that?" You demanded.

"Never mind him. That's not important." 1 waved his hand in the air, attempting to return to the previous topic of conversation. But you weren't listening. You walked off toward where the striped stitchpunk had been spotted.

Going into his corner, you looked in awe at the wall, where there were dozens of drawings of the same thing, all hung up together, some over the others, but all portraying the same exact circular shape.

You lowered your eyes to meet his. They were like a deer in the headlights. You saw, at once, who he was -- misunderstood, weak, and faced with injustice and trauma. All the things you vowed to use the gift of your life to protect others against.

You sat down across from him to give him a sense of ease. Seeing that you weren't about to speak, he continued on with his drawings, silently, sometimes lifting his nervous eyes to look at either you or 8. Soon, he came to realize that he wasn't about to be bothered. The look of relief in his eyes was enough to confirm in you that the right decision was made.

8:

It was lonesome.

Thunder boomed and lightning zapped. Intense winds blew about, causing dust to rise outside and blow in the air. You were inside, safe and secure, but it didn't make you feel any better. You were still in The First Room, where you had awoken some couple weeks ago. Knees pulled up to your chest, you whimpered, frightful of what might happen. The Scientist was dead, and you were all alone. You didn't know where to go, and didn't want to risk going outside and putting yourself in danger, with no idea which direction the others could be in. You almost didn't hear it over the sound of mother nature wreaking havoc on the earth, but wood creaked near the front door, putting you on edge. You looked out from your hiding place and saw a small stitchpunk like you, walking in the building with a cane in his right hand. Immediately upon seeing him, your throat clenched up with an oncoming sob of thankfulness, and you ran out into the middle of the room, desperate to interact with another being.

His surprise to see you was quickly pushed to the back corners of his mind, as he tried to calm you down. You wrapped your arms around him in a tight hug, somehow trusting him even though you'd never met him. He gently patted your back.

"Here, it'll be all right. I'm going to bring you back with me, okay?"

"Back where?" You asked, quietly.

He pulled away and placed a hand on your shoulder, smiling warmly. "To a place where you won't ever have to be alone again."

The Sanctuary was where he took you. It was a nice, big church, albeit greatly disturbed by the war. You walked around pieces of rubble as you made your way to the entrance, where a bulky giant stood, half a pair of scissors and a knife held onto his back by a magnet. He seemed to be guarding the entrance, and he looked dumbfounded by your appearance. Before 2 could get a chance to explain, you rushed up to the big brute and hugged him tightly around the waist. You were just too happy to see another person -- you couldn't help yourself. Awkwardly, and uncertain of himself, he hugged you back, conflicted as to how he should react.

You pulled away, looking up at him with gleaming eyes. A voice calling you pulled your attention away from him, and you spun to acknowledge 2, who was by the door. You quickly hopped after him and followed him inside, happy to be able to see more companions, and not to have to be alone again.

Still standing outside, 8 scratched his head in confusion, unable to wrap his brain around what had just happened.

9:

You were traveling somewhere, not quite certain of the exact location. But it was better than sitting around and doing nothing.

A storm had just blown over the area, and trash was scattered all about the place, severed limbs having traveled dozens of feet away from the bodies they belonged to. You shivered, but pulled yourself together. You would find out where you were meant to go soon. There had to be something in this wasteland. Something.

As your mind was wandering, you nearly stepped on torn burlap. Glaring down, you startled yourself on the realization of what it was, and ended up tripping over your own feet. It was the body of someone like you!

The fabric was almost exactly the same, and it had similar eyes -- it was most definitely made by the same creator. Your excitement almost died when you realized there was a possibility it was dead.

You examined the injury. He was right next to a tin can, and the way his head was positioned, he'd likely hit it hard. His shoulder was torn, and he was trapped underneath a small rock. Harsh, but you didn't think it was enough to break him. You lifted the rock with ease, and then felt his head to see if it was indented. It looked just fine.

You didn't have much to deal with the tear, though. You wondered what you could possibly do for that.

At any rate, you moved him inside of the tin can for safety, and waited for him to awaken. When he did so, you noticed that he was more curious about you than the condition of his body. He asked you where you'd come from, and how you were alive, as they'd all assumed The Scientist was dead. You questioned him on how many people were in his group, and were pleasantly surprised upon hearing how many of them were all united together in one place.

"Why don't you come back with me?" He offered. "There's plenty of room. And no one should be forced to stay out here in these conditions."

"Speaking of which, why were you out here?" You prodded, avoiding his question. He gave a nervous chuckle and explained I's leadership, and how he wasn't really supposed to have gone off exploring on his own, but he'd been curious. He'd wanted to go back to The First Room, and look through it once more. You listened to him as he told his story, thinking about what you wanted to do with your existence -- which path you wanted to take.

"... How about this? Because I don't trust that you're in a good enough condition to take care of yourself." You turned away from him, arms crossed. "I'll accompany you to The First Room. That's where I came from. And then, I'll travel with you back to your home, to make sure you get there all right. I'll decide at that point where I want to go." You turned your head in his direction, your body still angled away. "Deal?"

He smiled. "Thank you. Deal."

You turned your head away, feeling a bit embarrassed, for some odd reason you couldn't quite understand.

You gathered your weapons and the few items you'd scavenged. Your back still turned, you practically jumped out of the can, shouting behind you, "D-Don't take too long! I want to get this over with as quickly as possible."

9 smiled in response and climbed out after you.

II {Your First Time Alone Together}

Chapter Notes

[I have some clarifications to make before we get on with the scenarios.

Firstly, let me explain a bit about this one in particular, as it says “Your First Time Alone Together”. 3 and 4 are never really apart, and I didn't think they would separate too much in any circumstance, but their scenes still make sense in that it is only you with the twins, and you're sharing the moment with whichever twin you're paired up with, whereas the other is sort of in the background. It'll make more sense once you read through them.

Also, for some of these, the reader was technically alone with them in the last part. However, to clarify, this part is more about free time in which you both made the decision to spend time together, purely of your own free will.

Lastly, I want to make a note that might ease any confusion. I'm writing this as if all the machines are defeated, but all of the stitchpunks are still alive, though none of the events of the movie took place. So, they still fear that something might be out there, but there isn't a clear enemy they have to fear. Hope that helps!

Now, please enjoy!]

1:

You'd been roaming about the Sanctuary aimlessly. There wasn't much to be done, and you'd grown tired of napping. The others were great to be around — you found them to be quite likable, and you'd spend time assisting them in any way you could. But the inventors didn't need any help at the moment, and you didn't quite feel like leaving the Sanctuary like 7 was wanting you to. You'd been walking around in the Emptiness long enough, and you were tired of it. Also, you wanted to be on 1's good side. There wasn't really a point of endangering both your physical self and someone's opinion of you.

Still, you enjoyed walking around the church's halls, daydreaming, sometimes being too caught up in your own world to notice where you're going. It was peaceful here, and you felt enough at home that you didn't have to watch your back anymore. You could detach yourself from reality as much as you wanted. However, that, too, could grow dull. After circling back to where you had started twice, you decided that you should occupy yourself another way.

That was when 1 suddenly popped into your mind. You had wanted to get closer to him, so why not use this time to your advantage? You grabbed a small booklet that you'd found lying

around (though it was quite tiny and thin for a book, and you could carry it, it was still half the size of your body) and began to head his way.

You arrived in his throne room shortly afterward. 8 was nowhere to be seen, and 6 wasn't paying any attention, not even visible in his own little corner of the room. It seemed the two of you were alone.

1, as usual, was seated on his throne, dressed in his hat and cape, with his staff in his right hand. His narrow eyes grew as they took in your appearance; he hadn't been expecting you, and hadn't thought that he'd see you so soon. Nevertheless, his eyes soon narrowed once more, back into their natural state, giving him a serious demeanor. You hid a smile, thinking of how flustered he would be if you suddenly hugged him. It was entertaining, imagining someone as seemingly uptight as him in such an awkwardly cute situation.

Still, you didn't want him to see you as annoying or cheeky. You wanted him to respect you, so you chose to respect him. You'd slowly pull him out of his comfort zone eventually — you were determined to get him to loosen up. Not just for your own entertainment, but because you felt it would help him to enjoy life more, and it would cause the others to like him more, as well.

“(Y/N). What business do you have with me?” He was questioning you, but you weren't going to give away your plans, just like that.

“None,” You said simply, sitting yourself down on the ground nearby. You opened up the little booklet you had brought, and began to read.

Dumbfounded, 1 stared down upon you as you read, back turned to him, not even the slightest bit of attention cast his way.

“Wh-What are you doing?” He demanded. He couldn't understand why you chose to come into *HIS* area, when most everyone stayed away, and yet, not even acknowledge him. Your nonchalant presence, so close to him, so independent and uncontrolled, was bothering him. He found it difficult — no, impossible — to simply ignore you. 1 did try, but he couldn't just close his eyes and be at peace, because he had no idea what your ambitions were and what you were capable of. Perhaps that was your goal? To unsettle him?

“Reading. Would you like to read, too?” You suggested kindly. You didn't see his face contort into a scowl.

“Of course not. They ruined our world. What does it matter what they left us?”

You turned your head, and looked thoughtfully up to him. “It means everything,” You stated matter-of-factly. 1 still seemed confused, but you didn't expand upon your claim. “Come here. I'll show you.”

“Perhaps I don't want to be shown.”

Something in his voice made him sound like a stubborn child, and you had to try your best not to grin, knowing it would unsettle him further. You didn't think less of him for his rude

behavior. After all, there was most definitely a kindness hidden deep within, and you already loved him for it.

You continued to gently press him, and finally you convinced him to leave his throne. 1 strode over to you, his gait quite calm and collected, though his face showed mild irritation. *'He must have been bored,'* you thought, facing your booklet again. You sensed him standing above you, peering down over your shoulder and squinting down at the text in front of you.

The booklet's subject was religion — Christianity, to be exact. 1 disagreed immensely with the idea of religion, being a natural existentialist himself, but he decided to read through it anyway. He was admittedly bored, sitting around with very little to do all day, and now he was very puzzled about you. Now you had made yourself stand out in his eyes, and he felt inclined to analyze you further.

With him standing above you from behind, and you sitting with your head facing the ground, he was unable to see you smile softly.

2:

As you stood silently in the hallway, breathing in the stagnant air, you recalled how 2 had been the one to bring you here. He had shown you such kindness, despite not knowing a single thing about you. You had at first figured that he must not be very smart — obviously, no intelligent creature would allow a stranger into their home, possibly endangering all their loved ones, if they weren't certain that the person in question was good. However, as you'd begun to realize through your observations, your first hypothesis was very, very wrong.

2 was definitely not lacking in intellect. You could tell by seeing the spark in his eyes, and by watching his hands as he worked with the inner wires of some electronic system. He seemed quite focused, hardly ever taking his eyes off of it. The concentration evident in his narrowed optics displayed the gears turning in his head. You would be a fool to call him one.

And yet, why did he bring you in? To keep an eye on you? So they wouldn't have to worry about a rogue stitchpunk running around, without a clue of where it might be, or what it might be doing?

But, the kindness in his eyes... No, his intent was clear. He wanted to do you a favor by bringing you here, by placing you in a safe environment with those you could get along with and feel protected around. But why? Why was he so... carefree? No, that wasn't the word... Trusting, maybe?

Yes. He was too trusting. That was his weakness. You wanted to blame him for it, but you were happy to have been welcomed in. Though they didn't pay much attention to you — except, of course, the first few moments in which they crowded you excitedly, interested in finding out what type of stitchpunk you were — they at least didn't seem to dislike you. You were sort of just there.

And because you were stealthy, no one should have noticed you spying on 2 from outside the room. It also helped that no one was in the hallway, and no one but 2 was in the room. You weren't quite sure why you were watching him so secretly, but you were afraid to get closer, and you were mildly interested in what he was doing.

He was humming to himself as he pulled apart the insides of some rectangular device. It was a roughly 10 by 12 inch box, and silver, with various buttons on the front. It was clearly some human invention that he was meddling with, examining the inner material for current usability.

You observed noiselessly, without giving him a single reason to suspect your presence. Still, 2's sixth sense gave it away. The odd feeling of something off caused him to turn around suddenly.

Already you were out of sight, but 2 wasn't fooled. He smiled, and in a friendly voice, he called out to you. "(Y/N), come on in!"

You felt frozen for a second. How did he know you were there? Did you make a sound without noticing? Did you smell? Did he have some sort of mirror that he spotted you in? You wanted to ask, but you felt too nervous over the fact that he was inviting you in. You felt obliged to take him up on his offer.

You sauntered inward, acting as relaxed as you possibly could, even though you did not feel relaxed at all. Before he could say anything, you nodded toward the device he was working on.

"What is that?"

His eyes rested on the metal box. "I don't quite know myself. But whatever it used to be doesn't matter much anymore; it's what's on the inside that counts." He lifted a pair of tweezers and peeled inside of it by holding open a small door. You briefly wondered if he was making some sort of analogy, but you didn't ponder on it for too much longer. You were distracted as 2 spoke up again.

"Can you come over here and hold something for me? It'd be a big help."

You quickly complied, moving to stand directly beside him. You held the tweezers as he pulled out a bunch of wires, and held them while he separated the wires and examined them. Then, he asked for the tool back, and you gave it to him.

The two of you worked together for a good while as partners, side-by-side. You were very close — close enough to unnerve you, making your heart race, anxious by the close contact, but also strangely happy at the same time, because you felt that, of all the stitchpunks here, 2 was the one you could trust and grow to love the most.

3:

The sun had set hours ago, and darkness was spread across the land. A faint candlelight burned in a small section of the library, where 3 and 4 read, standing close together. The light had a very small radius of only a few feet, and some parts of the page were still difficult to make out. They pushed the book back and forth in order to make out the words and images with the little light they had. They were careful, however, not to catch any of the pages on fire. They'd learned their lesson after a similar incident had occurred in the past.

Though only a small light shone within the library, the moon and the stars gave out light of their own, covering enough of the land that a person could see the outlines of statues and buildings and such.

7 was gone, out scavenging, exploring. She was still skeptical that nothing else existed, especially with your sudden arrival. But, that was not the main reason she was gone — she was searching for new weapon parts, for new materials for 2 and 5 to build with, and for signs of life. Or simply for something to entertain the curiosity of the twins. Books could not hold all that the world had to offer. Some things had to be experienced and sensed in person.

You upheld your promise to guard the library while 7 was gone. You sat, unflinching, unmoving, with extreme focus and discipline, ready to make note of any small movement in the shadows. You already had several plans made up in your mind of what you were going to do under various factors and conditions of problems arose. You had planned strategies for almost any scenario that you had trained for. 3 and 4 might have been intimidated by you, but that meant your enemies must be, too, which was your main goal in the first place. Protect the innocent, by any means necessary. The ends justified the means. They didn't have to understand that.

3 lifted his head from the book, his optics trained on you. You sat all alone, like usual, but didn't seem bothered at all by it. He was intrigued, to say the least. Of all the stitchpunks, you showed the least emotion, and though you didn't act like it, perhaps you were the loneliest of all.

He took a step away from the book. It was a very small step, but it still caused 4 to freeze in his spot and gaze into 3's direction. Noticing where his line of vision was, 4 felt a bit of anxiety creep into him, sending 3's intentions. Their eyes met and flashed together, reflecting off 4's skeptical, almost scared nature and 3's curiosity. 3 then began to walk away, and though 4 knew what the flash meant — “stay back a little” — he couldn't. Being away from 3 was practically impossible, as they were nearly inseparable, and he felt himself being pulled toward 3 as he moved away.

3 slowly approached you. You'd heard the light footsteps and tilted your head in his direction, confused as to why he would be coming near you. “Is there a problem?” You asked, a fierceness in your voice, not aimed at him, of course, but at whatever had probably concerned him enough to come to you.

3 quickly shook his head, and took a reflexive half a step backwards. You turned your head away, trying to focus back on the world outside, feeling a bit of guilt for scaring such a mild creature.

The next action of his, which surprised you more than the one before, was him taking a seat right next to you.

Quickly, you asked, “What are you doing?”, with a less harsh voice, though it still sounded somehow defensive. But 3 didn’t respond; you’d forgotten that he couldn’t speak. You apologized, for what you thought was offensive, but his eyes simply appeared puzzled.

The two of you quietly sat there together, no longer speaking to one another, but acknowledging the others’ presence. You waited until 7 would return, with him watching you, and you watching the perimeter, a bit too uncomfortable at the thought of looking him in the eyes, and knowing that you must concentrate on your job, to ensure that no creature or machine would ever again threaten the lives of you or your companions.

4:

You were sitting down on the page of a large textbook, dead silent. You were mouthing the words as you read quietly — the only time you were ever quiet, really. It helped you to recall the information in the future.

Across the room, 3 and 4 were also intently looking through books. However, they weren’t reading it so much as they were flickering their eyes at it, capturing and cataloguing as much information as they could. They were wild, while you were still and quiet. It was a drastic change from your typical behaviors.

You’d had all of your attention on your book, but over time something else slowly began to steal it away. You sensed something odd and unusual around you, and though at first you ignored it, the feeling persisted. You took your eyes off the book for a minute and caught 4 looking at you.

You had differentiated between the two of them purely based on personality by now. You didn’t even have to look at their numbers to be able to tell which was which; if they could swap the numbers stitched into them, you would still know who was who. It shocked you that the other 7 stitchpunks didn’t seem to comprehend that they were very different, despite how similar they might seem at first glance. It had become pretty clear that 3 took the initiative, and 4 was more timid. Of course, both of them were rather shy and frightful, but 4 was more so. 3 was calmer, and 4 was more easily excitable. He reacted far stronger than 3 did, whether it was when the others came to visit (4 would run up to them, while 3 would walk slowly) or when a sudden sound made them fearful (3 would become still and look around, but 4 would often flinch and move closer to 3). This made 4 much more entertaining to tease, or simply just to be with, in your eyes.

A bright smile sat playfully on your face as you called him over. His reaction was fairly predictable; mortified, he quickly jumped behind his twin and tried to hide himself from sight. 3 had a strange, half-concerned, half-annoyed look on his face.

You just laughed and beckoned 4 over again. “Come on, it’s all right. I just want to show you something. Both of you, come here.”

Curiously, 3 hesitated for only a moment before sharing a look with his twin and taking the first step toward you. 4 approached you along with his brother, but still kept very close behind him, embarrassment spread across his face.

You moved the candlelight in a specific manner, so that your bodies made shadows along the bare edge of the bookshelf. You lifted up your hands so that their shadow was visible, and pulled your left hand into a fist, while your right hand was extended. You placed them together so that the shadow on the bookshelf appeared to be a snail.

3 and 4 both showed extreme fascination at the image, their eyes flickering with interest, and they began cataloguing both the figure on the wall and your hand pattern. Once they seemed to have fully understood how it worked, they made the snail figure with their own hands and seemed to take pride and joy in watching it appear as a shadow. They made it move around, replicating the animal that they'd seen before only in books and in old footage.

You then showed them a new image — a swan. Then, a wolf. Then, an elk. They never seemed to grow tired of the images, and after you showed them a good few, they began trying to make their own signs, messing around like children.

You decided to leave them be for a little while, and returned to your book for reading. 3 continued to practice the hand forms and study them, while 4 gazed after you, a curious tint in his eyes. He quietly followed you over, and inspected the book you were reading.

You'd been nonplussed that 4, the meek stitchpunk that he was, had followed you of his own accord, even as his twin remained a few meters away. You smiled welcomingly and patted the spot next to you, giving him the option to join you. Nervously, 4 obeyed, sitting down exactly where you had signaled for him to.

You gave him one last smile before you placed all of your attention back on the text. 4 did his best to relax and calm his jittery heart (soul might have been the more appropriate term for it). Side by side, the two of you began to read and flip the pages together silently.

5:

You swiftly strolled into a tiny room with a carefree smile on your face, which blossomed into a wide grin when your (e/c) eyes fell upon 5. You hadn't been able to get to him alone, despite the several days you'd been there so far. He was always with 2, it seemed, or 9. You liked 2 and 9 a lot, but you wanted to get to know 5 personally, and that required the two of you spending time together one-on-one. He was different from the others, and it wasn't just because of his missing eye. It had to do with his personality.

Sure, their group was full of nice stitchpunks. But 2's kindness was a sort of humble, parental kindness, and 9 was simply respectful. 5, on the other hand, had a softness and purity to him unlike any of the others. This purity must have been what attracted you to him. He felt more genuine than the others. You liked that about him.

Somehow, he hadn't yet taken notice of you, even though you weren't trying to hide the sound of your footsteps. His back was turned to you, as he stood hunched over a table, eyeing blueprints that were lying on the table between him and a small model of some sort. It was still unfinished, and you could only make out the basic shape, as no details were yet made on it.

Seeing as how he was distracted, your grin stretched even further, and you carefully made your way towards where he stood. Finally, when you were standing just behind him, you slowly and calmly reached your arms out over his shoulders and wrapped them around his neck in a surprise hug.

You'd given him a fright; he gasped loudly as your arms fell loosely around him, making you giggle. As he recognized the sound of your voice and the harmless playfulness of it, the alarm of the sneak-attack soon morphed into embarrassed uneasiness, especially after you leaned your head against the top of his shoulder, in the small crevice beside his neck. You felt his nervous intake of breath.

You felt comfortable like that, but you knew he probably didn't, so you let go of him and pulled away, taking a step forward to be right beside him. "What are you doing?"

"U-Um, well..." His voice was a bit shaky, so he cleared his throat, and then continued. "We've been well-prepared for any attacks — or, at least, we think we are. And we have no reason to believe we'd be in any danger, anyway. So... 2 and I decided to start a project for leisure." He rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. "Because we're going to be here a long time, and it's going to get boring."

"Sooooo... what is it?" You asked again.

"O-Oh, right... This," He pointed to the blueprint, "is a piano. We thought a little music might brighten the mood, and this way, we can even create our own, instead of relying on the same record discs over and over again. It's going to be small, so that one of us can use it by ourselves, though with that comes a lot of challenges."

"So this is the model?" You could now definitely see the shape of a piano in the model. "It seems... maybe too small."

"Yeah, we'll have to make it bigger. It's a good thing we made the model, or we'd have made so many mistakes."

"So, you know how to create one?"

"The twins are researching for us. Finding what they can in the library to help us."

"That's nice of them," You beamed, thinking about the twins, and how they'd be excitedly running all about the library looking for information. They'd probably see it as motivation to learn even more, not even a chore or a request.

"It's going to be a gift to all of us, after all," 5 chuckled, probably envisioning the same thing.

You cheerfully stated, “Well, I think what you’re doing is super cool!”

Awkwardly, 5 chuckled, and mumbled, “I suppose so…”

He lapsed into silence. You knew it was just in his nature, but you found quietness to be discomfoting, so you decided to be talkative. You began to babble on about little things like improvements of the weather and whether or not the group should start using calendars. The conversation inevitably turned into gossip, as you asked for 5’s insight as to what the deal was with 1 and 7 fighting all the time, and which two stitchpunks he thought were most likely to pair up (he thought 7 and 9; you thought him and 2 — and, when he freaked out and frantically tried to prove you wrong, you laughed and switched to your second guess, which was 1 and 2). You didn’t know why you felt like 2 was going to be the first, but you went with the feeling anyway.

You ended up succeeding in distracting 5 from his work, if that was your true intention — the two of you were laughing and talking for a long, long time that day, never growing bored of the other one’s company. 2, who had heard your voices from the hall, and was standing just outside the door, listening in to your conversations, smiled knowingly, and walked away.

6:

Early the next morning, you returned to the corner of the room where you had met 6 the previous day. There was already a sense of belonging that you felt there, despite 1 and 8 often being so close by. It was like your own little world. Well, it was 6’s own little world.

You found that he was already there when you arrived. Either he’d had a rough time sleeping, was naturally an early bird, or he just never returned to his room. You supposed it was either the first or the last of the three options. He didn’t strike you as someone who spent much time sleeping. The way he acted, somewhat jittery and nonsensical at times, seemed to reflect someone who did not relax quite enough. You felt concerned for his well-being.

The can of ink that he’d knocked over the day before was nearly empty, but 6 was still using it to draw. His fingers were like little pen nubs, so he simply dipped his fingers in the can and traced the paper with his finger. You observed him for a moment, watching his process, and then you took out one of your push pins that you used as throwing blades. You dipped the end in ink, sat next to a sheet of old, wrinkly paper, and began to draw on it.

6 gasped, suddenly noticing that you were there. He stopped in the middle of his drawing — something he usually only did if 8 was pestering him — and observed your drawing with shock evident on his face. You pretended not to notice, continuing to use your pin to outline the shape of a creature’s head, and then carefully drawing in eyes, a nose, ears, and a mouth. It looked like it was smiling with its mouth wide open — happy, in contrast to 6’s drawings.

When you were done, and you placed your pin down on the ground, 6 crept up close beside you (a bit too close for your comfort) and asked you what it was.

“It’s a dog; a creature that lived alongside the humans.”

“... It looks happy,” He murmured. The tone of his voice, however, reflected on how he mourned over the loss of so much life.

You glanced over at his collection of drawings. You’d noticed how they all seemed to be the exact same image — a creepy circle with three smaller circles drawn equally distanced apart, touching the outside lines of the shape. The three circles each had a distinct symbol inside of them. The drawing had some splotches of ink all around it, giving it an imperfectly perfect sort of appearance. It was eerie, but also pretty. Though you knew he didn’t draw it because it was pretty; 6 drew it because it had significance. Otherwise he wouldn’t have dozens upon dozens of the same image plastered around everywhere.

“... Why do you only ever draw that one image?” You asked him. He tilted his head, in a slightly confused manner, and answered as if it was the most obvious answer in the world.

“It’s the source.”

He didn’t seem to be opening up anytime soon, so you chose to drop the subject. 6 continued to work on yet another copy of his signature drawing, but with a certain anxiousness to his movements. It was almost as if he knew that he should say something, but he didn’t quite know what to say.

It was new for him. Most of the others chose to stay away from him. Even 9, who took him much more seriously than the others, didn’t ever choose to come and visit him, unless he was already around there for another purpose. 6 didn’t quite understand why you were voluntarily spending so much time with him. He felt a kind of warmth when you were nearby. It embarrassed him, but he was happy to have you around.

Still, it was true that he hadn’t seen you in his visions. Just where did you come from...?

6 noticed that you were watching the paper he was drawing on carefully, with a small frown. He looked down and realized that he had finished it, without even noticing. He had actually drawn over the same image twice, some of the lines looking very out of place, and the paper tearing in a spot or two due to his fingertips being too rough on the page.

Awkwardly, he pushed it aside, and reached for a new piece of paper. You already had it in your hands, and you were handing it to him. He took it from you slowly and carefully, in an attempt to calm himself down. He was very, very nervous today.

“Try drawing something else,” You suggested. 6 was a bit taken aback by the request, but he didn’t reject it. After thinking momentarily, he re-inked his fingers and made some simple strokes on the page, before drawing clear outlines of familiar shapes just above the strokes. It was a very simple drawing of a rainy day, the sun absent from the image. There were only clouds and diagonal slants of rain to be seen.

6 faced you, handing his picture over to you, as a little gift. You stared at it for a while, then took your own sheet of paper, and drew a related image.

Instead of rain, your picture showed a sunny day, with only a single puffy cloud in the sky, and a shining sun. You drew a tree and a pond, as well as grass, in the bottom of the sketch. It

was similar to 6's image, in that it was a picture of nature, but the emotion emanating from it was completely different.

You handed your drawing over to 6, completing your little gift exchange. He stared at your picture, as if not able to comprehend what meaning it held. You only hoped that your singular bright contribution to his hundreds of dark memories would be able to balance them all out so that he could, for the first time in possibly his entire life, find peace.

8:

Days had passed since you first arrived at the Sanctuary, and you fit in quite well. You very rarely were alone; you always made sure to be around somebody, with that somebody usually being 2 or 5. Everyone adored you — everyone but 1, that is — and you loved everybody in return.

It was one of those rare moments when you weren't with anybody. It was a cool evening, close to sunset, when you wandered near the entrance. You spotted the largest of the stitchpunks, 8, stepping outside, with an unusually peaceful aura about him. Curiosity took over you, and you quietly tiptoed after him, peeking out from behind the wall to figure out what he was doing.

8 had sat down on the staircase, pulled out a magnet from his back straps, and lifted it to the air just above his head. When mere centimeters separated it from his skull, it quickly began to take effect.

His eyes lit up like stars in the night sky, and his tough expression melted into a soft, happy one.

The tension in your muscles calmed down, as your previous theory was proven correct — he had some good in him after all. It wasn't like you doubted him, but it was difficult to find him in a moment when he wasn't intimidating.

Seeing his face all relaxed, 8 seemed rather approachable. You ambled over to him, watching him as he twitched upon noticing you, lowering down the magnet and glowering over at you. However, your unfaltering smile, even as you grew closer and closer, confounded him, and he couldn't hold the glare long.

Finally you were just a foot or so away, which was when you stopped, and you clasped your hands together excitedly. "Hi, I'm (Y/N)! I wanted to introduce myself to you, since I didn't really get to do that yet. What's your name?"

He hesitated, his usually rather slow mind reeling. Who even was this girl? Why wasn't she scared of him? Even sitting down, he was taller than you. "I'm 8."

You nodded, taking note of the number on his shoulder. Though, you'd sort of expected what his number would be, given the process of elimination. It was just an excuse to start up a conversation. You pointed to the magnet in his hands. "What's that do?"

8 opened his mouth to speak, but he wasn't good with words. He struggled to think of a way to explain it for a few moments, before ultimately deciding that you'd understand best if you experienced it yourself. He stood up and held it just over the top of your head.

8 was right; you understood right away. You felt relaxed, in a way. Blissful. Your eyes sparkled, and you exhaled, releasing away all of your tension. It was a magical kind of feeling.

After watching you for a minute or so, he gently lifted the magnet until you did not feel it anymore. He didn't understand. Something about you was... different from the others. For some reason, the thought of teasing you like he did 6 made him feel sick, and a bit angry, inside.

The magnet's absence was a bit disappointing, but you knew not to get addicted. After all, you had other ways of relieving yourself of stress. You lifted your eyes to meet 8's, and they brightened. "All right. You showed me your way of relaxing. I'll show you mine!"

He raised an eyebrow in confusion as you excitedly pulled him back to the stairs and had him sit down. Dazed, he complied. You told him to pick a spot on his body where he felt the most sore.

"... Uh... Back?"

"Okay~! Now, I'm going to start. Let me know if you feel pained or uncomfortable at any time, okay?" Suddenly, he began to regret this. Why was he putting himself at your mercy? He didn't even know what was going on. "Take a slow, deep breath, and relax."

8 inhaled as much air as he could, then exhaled it all. Your hands reached up and touched his fabric gently. He twitched, but otherwise remained still. Smiling, you began to massage his sore muscles, introducing him to your special technique that would lead you two to spend much more time together — which, eventually, would cause your relationship to blossom into something so much more than simply friendship.

9:

You fumbled around with the scotch tape as you absentmindedly searched through the room's containers and storage areas. Much of the supplies was not needed or in use, so 2 gave you the freedom to do whatever you wanted with the materials in his workshop, as long as you weren't going to destroy or break them for no reason. Of course, you realized the importance of every little item in the room, and you weren't about to waste any of them. You considered yourself to be a resourceful person, not a lavish or wasteful one.

But, even as you were taking stock of the supplies, you couldn't keep yourself completely focused on it. Your mind wandered to the one who'd shown you the way to the Sanctuary, 9. Whenever you were alone, and you let your mind wander, he was the first thing that you thought of.

Why? Why him? He didn't stand out appearance-wise or personality-wise in the group. Most everyone was very unique in some way, but 9... didn't. Maybe that was how he was unique — he looked normal. Real. He didn't have some strange quirk like 6's visions or 5's missing eye, or the twins' inability to speak. But he was reliable, friendly, and brave, and that separated him from all of the other male stitchpunks. Though 2 could also be considered under those criteria, there was something about 2 that made one feel as if they were below him, whether that was due to his wise, elder nature, or something else.

This, you reasoned, must be why 9 stood out to you. But why was he constantly on your mind? That could not be explained. Because you felt a connection with him, when you found him out in the Emptiness?

"Stop this," You mumbled to yourself, grabbing at your head and shaking it forcefully to clear it. You opened your eyes, and made a mental list of all the things you needed to search for in order to make your first present. You were a naturally inventive and creative person, and you wanted to see others smile when you gave them something meaningful. It would be a thank-you gift, for accepting you so easily.

'I should make an extra special gift for him...' You thought, before slowly realizing the implications of your thoughts, feeling yourself heat up in embarrassment, and subsequently banging your head repeatedly on the book lying on the floor.

It had been a single day since you'd accompanied 9 back to the Sanctuary, and already you had a crush on him. You wondered why on earth your creator would have made you such an easily-attached being.

Deciding that any further injuring of yourself would cause some concerns, you quickly vacated the room, headed for the front entrance. You were going to go out and scavenge for supplies for your next craft. You didn't even think twice about it, not caring about the consequences of disobeying 1. He was the only one who didn't seem to welcome you, probably because you aligned with 7 in most of your beliefs about what should be done. You tried not to take sides, but you knew for certain that you would do what you felt was necessary, no matter what 1 — or anybody else, for that matter — said. That, in the others' minds, seemed to mean taking 7's side. So be it. You weren't one to start conflict, but if it found you, you weren't going to run away.

Even if you didn't get along well with 1, everybody else seemed all right. You wanted to get acquainted with all of them. Your projects would be a means of getting to know others, and then they would get to know you. That was how it worked.

Just as you were turning to go out the door, you heard someone call out, "(Y/N)!" Frowning, you spun around to face whoever had yelled. You found, to both your surprise and horror, that it was 9. For some reason, you felt your throat close up, and you felt your hands shaking. You were very nervous. And the more you thought about it, the more nervous you got.

"Are you leaving?" He asked with concerned, sad eyes. You realized that he thought you were leaving for good.

You shook your head. "I'm just looking for some materials. I'm coming back."

9 looked relieved. It made your heart (soul?) swell.

You turned to go, but his voice rose again. “I think I should go with you.”

There came the anxiety again. You ignored it, standing tall and putting your hands on your hips, narrowing your eyes to try and appear tough. “No, I can go on my own. I’m capable of taking care of myself.”

“Maybe,” he replied, “but two sets of eyes are better than one. I’m going to go, too, if only just to be sure.”

You felt flustered, and in a hostile voice, you went, “Wh-Whatever. I’m leaving now!” You headed off, but 9 quickly followed you. Despite the weird feelings that you felt for him, you ended up allowing him to tag along, knowing that arguing would be futile, and would only cause you to make a fool out of yourself. Hesitantly, you trekked onward, with him at your side, traversing the Emptiness, once again, together.

III {When He Realizes He Has Feelings For You}

Chapter Notes

[Thanks for reading and helping to keep this fandom alive!]

1:

1 sat tiredly on his throne, a hand cupping his chin, as he lamented over the boredom that presided within him. All alone, he had nothing to do, and at times like these, he found all of his thoughts drifting towards you.

He recalled how, the other day, you had stood between him and 7 during one of their harsh arguments. He had been frustrated, far beyond the point of relaxation, but you had followed him as he stomped away, and managed to calm him down. Something about you was different than the others. You were able to quiet his temper in a way none of the others could. It was strange, and slightly concerning.

1 pushed the thoughts away, exhausted, despite not doing any physical exercise. He had begun to wonder, worriedly, if there was a secret reason or meaning behind this feeling of his. But there was no point to silly thoughts like this.

He slowly straightened, ignoring the light pains in his back as he stood up. 1 decided to walk around the Sanctuary, not only to quell his boredom, but also — though he'd never admit it — to find out what you were doing when you weren't pestering him.

1 knew that the others would gaze at him curiously. When 7 and 9 passed him in the hallway, 9's mouth was open in a tiny circle, conveying his slight surprise at seeing 1 roaming around the halls so casually. Usually if 1 was out, he had business to attend to, or he was at least walking with some fierceness to him, looking down upon the others he came across. But he was just strolling about this time, not quite focusing on any of them as he passed. 9 didn't think much of it, but felt a bit relieved that 1 didn't look like he was going to instigate a fight. 7, whose eyes had narrowed until 1 had passed, shrugged at 9 and continued talking.

He had found you in the lab with 2 and 5. They were lying on their backs underneath an elevated couple of planks of wood. You were sitting down on the floor beside them, dozing off as you held their tools for them. They seemed to be screwing together the wooden planks. There was a record playing across the room, and in addition to the voices of 2 and 5 cheerily talking to one another, it was quite loud. 1 couldn't see how you were able to fall asleep with all of the sounds playing at once.

1 felt himself being pulled into the room, as if it were by some kind of magnetic attraction. However, he knew that, as soon as he was spotted, his pride would force him to make an excuse as to why he had entered. He felt the need to cover up his motive, though he couldn't pinpoint the exact reason why. It made him feel vulnerable.

Stepping in and thinking quickly, he sputtered out, "What in the devil is all of this noise for?"

5 flinched and snapped his head up towards 1, hitting his head on the plank. The two stitchpunks crawled out from under the wood, 5 groaning and rubbing his head.

Without opening your eyes, you smiled lightly at hearing 1's entrance. 2 noticed this, and raised his head to 1, smiling warmly. "What we're making is a surprise."

"A surprise would be better hidden," 1 retorted. "The door is wide open."

5 seemed nervous about 1's arrival, but 2 was already trying to piece the puzzle together. 1 didn't seem too interested in what they were building at all, from the tone of his voice, and how his eyes were not focused on the project. He curiously began to wonder if you were the reason 1 showed up. Putting two and two together, his smile only grew.

"(Y/N), we'll be fine from here on out. Thank you."

"Huh?" 5's single eye blinked twice, his tone full of confusion. "But, 2, we're just about--"

2 shushed him, then leaned down to grab your hand, pulling you up to your feet. You swayed, half-asleep.

"You should go to your room and get some sleep. 1, could you accompany her? I'm worried she won't make it there on her own."

1 glared as viciously at 2 as he possibly could, but couldn't find any words to use in retaliation. He knew what 2 was doing. But this troubled him. If 2 could possibly tell what was going on in his mind, would the others be able to tell as well? This was not good.

He led you back to your room, quiet for a time. You stumbled a bit as you walked, and yawned quite a few times, but you did not fall. 1 made sure not to stand too close to you, and tried not to appear concerned.

"It's foolish to be walking around without any sleep. You'll go mad like 6."

"6 isn't crazy," You calmly responded, dreamily. "It's all about perspective... 7 says you're crazy, too. But you're not, are you?"

Embarrassed, 1 muttered some dark insults toward 7, and ignored your question.

You finally reached your room, and, to 1's surprise, he found himself not wanting to walk away. He lingered at the door, feeling torn for a moment, as you stood in the doorway. Your sleepy, half-closed eyes still did not miss this, and you softly asked, "Do you want to stay?"

Horried, 1 rapidly shook his head. "N-No! Of course not!"

You smiled. “Good night,” You murmured as you closed the door. 1 remained standing there, listening to the click of the door and your footsteps as you moved away from the door, and then plopped down onto your bed. Once it was silent for a good half a minute, he forced his feet to move, finding that it took him great effort to leave. It wasn’t that he was physically tired, but something inside of him hurt to go away.

It was like a gnawing, twisting feeling deep inside of him, like something was wrong. And he knew something WAS, indeed, wrong, as he could feel heat rising up within him, and embarrassment of some illogical sort bubbled in his chest.

Quiet laughter sent a chill down 1’s spine, and he spun around angrily to face whoever was mocking him. It wasn’t a surprise that it was 2, who had overheard it all.

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to laugh. It’s just too funny.”

“What is it that you find so humorous?”

“That you, of all people, are the first of us all to have a crush on another.”

1 snorted. “You’re letting your imagination run wild.” Though he put on an undeterred facade, internally he was sick with anxiousness. Could it be true? Why must it be him, out of all of them?

“I support you,” 2 stated, patting 1 on the shoulder, before turning around and heading back to the lab where 5 was waiting.

1 felt absolutely humiliated, as if everything he had ever done wrong was now out in the open. Yet, at the same time, there was a strange warmth in his heart. 1 pondered it momentarily, and decided that there was no mistake about it — he truly did have feelings for you.

1 despised it. It was illogical. It was a weakness, a burden, an internal struggle. It was a feeling of desperate need for you, and he knew it would only bring unnecessary pain. He was stronger without these new and worrisome emotions.

1 let out a deep breath, and rubbed his forehead wearily. It was what he thought it was. If found out by the others, this would ruin his reputation, and cripple him even further.

It was illogical. It was wrong.

He swore to himself that he would avoid you at all costs, until he was certain that this feeling would go away, and he would be back in control of himself again.

2:

A ray of warm sunshine beamed down upon the Sanctuary. The typically overcast sky was still covered with clouds, but they were more white than gray, and fluffier than anything the stitchpunks had ever seen. There was more than enough room for the sun to peek through and greet them, and 2 was thankful for such great weather. It was rare for the day to be so bright and calming, but the weather had, indeed, been improving as of late. It was gradual, of course — the sky was more green than it was blue, and the clouds still appeared unnaturally colored, not quite as white as in the past. But it was something.

2 was relaxing on the stairs to the Sanctuary, enjoying the nature's charm. His entire life, he'd never known such a comforting feeling could exist outdoors. It was a pleasant surprise.

Unfortunately for the others — in his opinion — they didn't join him.

1 was at his throne, bickering with 7 over the dangers of leaving the Sanctuary, following her latest escapade in which she'd come back injured from a rough fall. She'd ripped up her seams and given 5 a scare when he'd spotted her limping in. 8 stood on guard, at a distance from which he could step in if necessary to protect his leader.

6 was drawing, as usual. He didn't go outside very often. 3 and 4 were reading — they wouldn't appreciate the sun that much anyway in comparison to 2. They'd grow bored and impatient, wanting to learn more rather than sit around and waste time.

5 and 9 were standing guard at the watchtower up above. Somebody was required to be there at all times, and 9 volunteered to be there. 5 decided to show him some of the inventions and tools up there. Perhaps they could get the same sort of enjoyment up there, seeing the sun, but it wouldn't feel nearly as nice as basking in it.

2 stretched, his mind drifting toward the final person not there — you. It was another reason he'd chosen this exact location to rest. Of course, 1 would have yelled at him if he'd gone too far, but he chose the staircase so that you wouldn't get past him when you returned to the Sanctuary.

Since you'd arrived, you usually stayed by yourself. 2 had noticed it, but never commented on it. He was the most social, after all, and many of them were independent — 1 and 6 were the prime examples, though 8 and 7 often went on their own, too. But if they wanted to be social, they knew who to go to. 1 went after 2 or 8, 6 could find 2 or 9, 8 would seek out 1 or 7 (or 6, unfortunately), and 7 would spend time with any of them.

But 2 had never seen you go to anyone. He believed that you must be lonely, and he didn't want you to feel that way. You were too good of a person to have to be sad.

After some time of resting and reflecting, 2 picked up on the slight sound of a quick, quiet step beside him. His eyes opened and he caught sight of your near-silent sprint toward the building. You were moving so quickly; he was surprised that you'd gotten so far before he noticed you.

"Hey, (Y/N)!" He watched as you cringed, and then stopped just before turning the corner into the building. You turned to face him, timidly. 2 patted the space beside him, your cute expression making him smile. "Come sit with me a moment."

The gesture wasn't purely selfless, though. In his mind, the only thing that could make this weather better would be sharing it with someone. And sharing it with you, in particular.

Your nervousness was clear as you hesitantly approached him, and it seemed to take forever before you sat yourself down at his side, about a foot apart. 2 took the initiative and started the conversation. "I rarely get to see you. What've you been up to?"

You hadn't wanted to talk, afraid of saying something wrong and making a fool out of yourself, but it was impossible not to answer. "I've just been exploring... sometimes with 7, because... I want to be of use to you all somehow."

2 voiced his thoughts. "You're really nice, (Y/N)."

Modestly, you dismissed the comment, awkwardly shrugging it off and restating your reasons. "Really... I want to help you in any way I can, for bringing me here."

2 shook his head. "(Y/N), your mere presence is a help here." Confused, you waited for him to explain. "You don't have to do anything to earn your acceptance into this group. None of us did, and it's the same for you. You're already one of us."

A gentle silence fell upon the two of you, and then you responded with a quiet, "Thank you." A moment between you passed, with 2 calmly relishing it and your anxious mind scrambling about rapidly, before you suddenly jumped up, causing him to gaze up in a sort of amused confusion.

"Thank you again!" You said sincerely, before sprinting back inside, where you could hide in your shadowy room from the stress of human (stitchpunk?) interaction.

2 looked after you longingly, in that moment realizing that he wanted you back, in a very strong way. He had felt something in his soul when you joined him, something pleasant, and now he felt empty without you there. Even the sun could not return the same amount of warmth.

2 was no stranger to such emotion. Though the other stitchpunks were not as well-versed in feelings and recognizing them, he was wise enough to comprehend what it meant.

2 felt himself smile bittersweetly, his eyes rather sad for one like him, who was typically content and positive no matter the situation. This was because he felt he knew the outcome.

There was a very little chance that you would like an old geezer like him in the same way. You were kind, but love was not about kindness — it was something quite random, quite illogical, and though he could point out various features of yours which attracted him, he could just as easily list features of other stitchpunks that he liked about them, and the connection he felt toward you was different than that of the others.

Even though this disappointment was bound to occur, and he would feel the dull pain of rejection every time he saw or thought of you (which he planned to be much more often, whether or not you desired it just as much), this feeling was one worth suffering loneliness for.

3:

Weeks had gone by since your arrival at the library, and much had changed since then. Most of your time was spent there, growing acquainted with your surroundings and with the few stitchpunks that lived there. Your first encounter with them had been shaky and abrupt, but the tension and uncertainty that had existed back then was now diminished — at least, on 3's part.

4 continued to be wary of you, simply based on pure instinct. He was one of the more timid creations, and you, being one of the bolder stitchpunks, didn't mix with him well. You didn't have any negative feelings toward him, though. You tried to distance yourself for his comfort, and that was the extent of your communication, in most cases.

3, however, was a completely different story.

It took some time for you to notice that it was always the one with the "3" sewn onto his cloth who came to sit beside you while you stood watch outside. The other one was further behind, and always had a hint of fear in his eyes. But this one had the haunting eyes of a wise child peering into one's soul, and it unnerved you, though you acted otherwise. The amount of attention he was casting on you wasn't something you felt accustomed to.

Even if it made you a bit uncomfortable, you couldn't deny that you found him interesting — definitely more so than any of the others. There was something about him that you just couldn't place, but that made your soul feel content whenever he came by. You began to spend your precious moments together more and more often, and eventually it seemed that you would never be on guard without the meeker stitchpunk at your side.

It wasn't as if you spoke together or anything. After all, neither of the twins were capable of speech, and even if they were, you weren't much of a talker. You preferred to express through action, or body language, rather than struggle to find the exact words you wanted to use. There was far more room for misinterpretation or error in speech than there was in a hand gesture or facial expression, and it simply wasn't worth it.

But 3 didn't seem to mind. Though the moments began to matter to you, so much so that you were concerned when he didn't join you immediately, very little of it was spent interacting with one another. You didn't even look at each other — well, *YOU* didn't look at *HIM*. But you didn't need a distraction. You could allow yourself to stare at him later, when you weren't on duty.

He, on the other hand, rarely kept his eyes off of you.

You'd shared just a few unique moments together in the few weeks that you'd been present. At one point, 3 had fallen off of the bookshelf due to carelessness when reading the covers of books. He remembered it with a smile; of course, it had not been one he was proud of, but his soul swelled when he recalled how quickly you had rushed over to check on his condition —

you had been there sooner than even 4, and of course before 7, who hadn't even been there at the time. Nothing else could have deterred you from your duty, except the sound of 3's body crashing into the floorboards. He had been all right, but the warm feeling he felt when you had scooped him up and checked his body for rips or tears was worth the embarrassment.

Now 3 felt safe sitting next to you, and he was always happy just to look at you when you didn't talk.

Talking was something you'd rarely done around them — around 7, perhaps, but almost never around 3. You thought that it wasn't necessary, as he couldn't respond anyway, though he still would have liked to hear your voice. He hoped that you would one day open up, so he could learn more from you.

For now, he was content to watch you and catalogue what he could. 4 was just a little weirded out by this. It seemed like time wasted. What more could you learn from just sitting and doing nothing? And outside of the library, no less, putting yourself in danger, rather than letting the guard do her job?

3 couldn't explain it to his twin, since he could hardly explain it to himself. Whatever the reason, 3 was beginning to rather enjoy your presence. He assumed that it was because, in such a boring world as this one now was, you were something new, something interesting. But 4 had gotten over it already, whereas 3 never grew tired of it. 4 was deeply puzzled that 3 continued to harbor such an interest in you, and continued to catalogue you when he'd done it before. 4 sought out answers in his books while 3 remained with you.

After some time of silence, he reached out and touched your fabric. You flinched, and gazed down at him, but found those staring eyes gazing right back at you. Confused and slightly flustered, you pulled away, but he kept his hand on your arm, lowering his eyes to examine it. You waited patiently, your mind in utter chaos as he stroked your fabric, eyes flashing as he looked at it in more and more detail. Logically, he couldn't comprehend why he enjoyed such a thing, but part of him realized it was deeper than logic.

You had become his favorite subject; he wanted to learn more and more about you, knowing that there *MUST* be more deep down.

Still, 3 reasoned that this was abnormal, and beyond his relationship with 4, because 4 didn't feel the same way about you. Part of him knew the answer, though he did not think as intently on his reasoning behind his actions, but simply the results of them. He knew his feelings had developed beyond normalcy, but he honestly didn't care. Nothing could possibly stop this desire for you, and he didn't want it to.

4:

4 raised his eyes expectantly toward the entrance to the library. The sun shone bright, making a straight beam through the room, allowing for the perfect reading light. Indeed, it WAS the

time for reading, and that was what he and his twin were doing at the moment. 3 had his nose (figuratively, of course — they didn't have noses) buried deep into a historical text about war machines. They had read similar books before, when it was more necessary to study up on the dangers of the Machine, but now it was purely for interest, and perhaps to gain knowledge in the case that they ever returned, however doubtful that might be.

He jumped across the page to gain the best viewpoint, completely absorbed in his studies. His twin, 4, however, was having no such luck.

4 was peering through a book on the subject of water. Since the first rainfall in a long time had occurred and fascinated them all, it had become one of their greatest motivators. The possibility of natural life springing up again gave them hope that everything would turn out okay, if they only held on and did their best to remake the world. Researching the properties of water, then, must be of some use. At least it was something they could do while the others risked their lives in the Emptiness, or worked or walked all day long to find trash to dispose of.

4 knew the importance of such a job, and he knew that he should at least do his best to focus, while the others were doing more than him. However, he could not help it — he was terribly distracted, and he could not be efficient if he couldn't concentrate. While he continued to read, the words were noted, but not comprehended. Every few minutes, he'd raise his head and glance over at the door, longingly. But no matter how often he looked, you would not appear.

It was strange that he *DID* want to see you, considering how he'd often tried to avoid you whenever you showed up. Sometimes he watched you from behind a bookshelf, sometimes he hid behind his twin. Most often, however, he ran somewhere further away, in a spot of the library only he and 3 knew about, where you wouldn't find him. Often 4 was simply too embarrassed to stay in there.

You didn't exactly make it easy for him. You were practically polar opposites — you were talkative, 4 was shy. You were loud, he was mute. You were flirtatious, and he was reserved. Every time you met, you teased him in some way, or squeezed his cheeks, or gave him a touch on shoulder, or did *SOMETHING* to embarrass him. You couldn't help it — he was too cute.

But as time went on, 3 grew more and more irritated with the change he saw in his twin. 4 was growing more distant and less focused. What was even worse was, 4 didn't even seem to realize or care that this was happening. 3 watched as his twin glanced at the entrance every once in a while, and his optics only grazed over the text for a few seconds before flickering back towards the source of the light.

It was lonely, being one of the only ten existing creatures of your kind (that you knew of, at least). It was more lonesome when you were shy and closed off from them. But loneliest of all was when the only one you *WERE* close to started to spend their time with you thinking of someone else.

Without a warning, 3 hopped in front of 4, landing on the wooden surface of the floor with as much force as he could muster. The impact frightened the younger twin, who jumped in

terror, until he noticed the sound was just 3. The older twin grabbed the other's hand, and dragged him toward the end of the bookshelf. The surface was smooth and dark, perfect for what he intended to do. 3 communicated a bright image of you onto the side of the bookshelf, and pointed at it, then 4, with a furious digit.

The message did not come through well. Puzzled, 4 tilted his head at his twin, then examined the image more. Nothing was out of place with it, to his knowledge, and he wasn't sure why 3 was upset. Was he angry with you?

3 pointed at his twin, made a heart-shape with his hands, and then pointed back at the image of you. 4 jumped backwards, eyes wide with understanding, and he waved his arms around while shaking his hand to show that 3 was wrong. But there was about to be proof that showed otherwise.

It was at that moment that you finally walked in. You were singing a light tune that filled the air with your presence before you even stepped inside. Before you passed through the entrance and saw the stitchpunks, 3 grabbed his twin and dragged him away from the door, hiding them both behind the bookshelf. It was at this point that 4 felt himself grow even more embarrassed, as he realized that 3 was right — your presence made him feel warm inside, in a pleasant way — though it also made him want to run away from it. Such an extraordinary feeling could only be caused by you.

“Hey, Fooooo-ooooooooour~!” You called his name in a sing-songy voice. “Come on out, I have a story for yooou~!”

3 glared at 4, as a warning not to react to your voice... but he couldn't help it. He hesitated, but then hurried to the edge and peeked out where he could see you, where you stood grinning triumphantly in wait.

4 couldn't bring himself to avoid your call. He ran out, timidly but eagerly, to greet you. He simply couldn't stay away from you or ignore you, even if his twin wanted him to — he knew he just didn't have the strength.

5:

Your smile was so sweet.

It filled up your entire face, and seemed to make your entire being radiate with happiness and energy that filled everyone else around you. It was natural, and yet it seemed heavenly. It was a sight he waited for every day, and struggled to preserve. He didn't ever want your smile to disappear. Sure, it might go away when you were surprised or working on something serious, but he never wanted it to fade away so much that you couldn't ever find it again. If something like that ever happened, 5 liked to think that he'd be the one to help you find it again.

You filled his everyday thoughts. He went throughout his day thinking of you. In the morning he wondered if he would run into you, and if you'd spend time together. At night, he dreamed of the things you might do together, and the conversations you might have. When he was bored throughout the day, he tried to prepare himself to talk with you by thinking of what you might say, and coming up with what his responses might be.

5 didn't have much else to do. It wasn't exactly entertaining, standing at the watch tower every day and peering through the telescope. It had been a miracle that you'd shown up and livened up his day. When 9 arrived, he had appreciated it, but not nearly as much as you. It was great having someone who could make such a dull and barren world suddenly seem worth living.

You made everything better. No one else had such a positive aura — 2 came pretty close, but everyone else was pretty serious and closed off. You were open, outgoing, friendly, and fun to be around. They needed you. Something had been missing, but now it was evident — your presence was what 5 had been waiting for all these months.

What 5 couldn't understand was why he was the only one to feel such affection toward you. Why did no one else see how important you were? Why didn't everyone gravitate toward you as much as he did? They liked you, certainly — maybe 1 was a bit annoyed by your cheerfulness, but even he could not harbor hatred toward you. After all, you were productive; you cleaned the place up and decorated, lifting up the mood, which made everyone else more productive, and more willing to do what must be done. When even 1 appreciates you, it's a great accomplishment. 5 felt proud of you, feeling you were his responsibility, as he was the one to find you. He took great pride in your achievements, and whenever someone praised you, he pointed out your strengths even further. The first time, it had made 2 look at him strangely, but now he chuckled every time 5 brought you up in a conversation. What was up with that?

5 leaned his head against the side of the telescope with a deep sigh, wondering when he would get to meet you next. It couldn't be soon enough.

“5!”

“Aaah!”

The telescope went flying across the room and down the hole, where it dropped towards the surface below. 5 yelled out a quick warning to anyone who might be in its path, crawling over to the edge to peek off. But the telescope didn't clash into any familiar figures, and 5 winced as the object shattered at the bottom. He was going to get an earful from 1 for that...

The person who had entered the room had not yet spoken. 5 raised his head toward the figure and jumped when he realized it was the elder he had hoped not to face. 1 was staring him down with his squinted narrow eyes; 5 was certain he was about to get lectured. Not only was he daydreaming when he was supposed to be on watch, but he also destroyed one of their most important tools. 5 looked down at the floor, awaiting his elder's harsh ranting.

“You *FOOL!*” 5 sighed; that was the strongest possible insult 1 would ever use for any of them. Undoubtedly, this one-sided scream-off was going to take too long.

“Do you understand the seriousness of what you have just done?!” 1 began to pace back and forth, not even looking at 5 as he unleashed his fury. “Now 2 is going to have to rebuild that thing, and we don’t even possess the right materials! It could take weeks — months — and we’ll be sitting here paranoid without ever knowing if a Beast is coming our way! How foolish!” 1 turned around and began walking in the other direction. “And — never mind the telescope, there’s a greater issue underlying that one. We can fix a tool, but how are we going to fix that concentration of yours?! What good is a tool if the user isn’t fit to use it?! Your purpose is to keep us all safe! Would you rather switch with 9 and endanger yourself in the Emptiness, than stay here in the security of our Sanctuary?! I can assure you, a change of positions is possible; in fact, I can make that change right now!”

“I-I’m fine here...”

“Then do your duty and quit slacking off!”

5 flinched. 1 glared in his direction, awaiting a response, whether verbal or physical, but 5 did nothing but cower. With an annoyed grunt, 1 said, “You’re finished here for today. Leave.”

Ashamed, 5 complied. With his head down and a metaphorical tail between his legs, he went down with 1 to the bottom floor, where they parted ways. 5 quietly wandered the halls, inwardly cursing himself for being so careless. 2 would not blame him, surely, but he would still be forced to deal with 5’s mistakes. 5 felt very bad about it — he felt worse about wasting 2’s time than he did about breaking the telescope. He decided he would do as much of the work as he could — it was the least he could do.

As he trudged down the hall, figuring he would seek out 2 before 1 could, his eyes caught sight of you in the distance, walking in his direction. He felt himself freeze; his limbs stopped moving, and he had to remind himself to breathe, and act natural.

Alongside you was 9, who was walking at the same pace. The two of you were smiling and chattering eagerly — you with a bubbly aura, and him with a more relaxed countenance. 5 couldn’t catch hold of what either of you were saying, but the bright smile and happy eyes of yours told it all.

A swarm of jealousy rushed through 5, and he couldn’t maintain the smile he had forced to greet you with. He couldn’t place the feeling at first — he generally had no ill-will towards anyone, and to feel it toward 9, of all people — arguably his *BEST FRIEND*?!

5 thought back to the time when the two of you had talked alone together. One of the various topics you had discussed was which stitchpunks might hook up first, and when he had brought up 7 and 9, you’d disagreed with him. Was that because you liked 9? Did you disagree because you didn’t want to admit that 9 might like someone else?

An intense loathing toward his closest friend was all 5 needed to pull himself together and realize the truth of the matter. He really, really liked you — enough that he would willingly fight his best friend for your attention. How did he get himself in this situation?

Embarrassed by the realization, he looked down, trying to hide his face from you and 9, as if you could read his thoughts.

“Oh — 5!”

... But he just couldn't ignore you. Hesitant, he lifted his head, and found a warm smile waiting for him. Even after his mistake, even after the strike of jealousy, he could not deny that the smile filled him with joy. Every bit of discontentment within him slipped away, and everything was good with the world — because you were in it.

6:

6 hummed as he paced around the floor nervously, mind fumbling around for some sort of creative idea. Several torn pages stained in ink lay at his feet, mistakes that he was too busy to dispose of.

He was trying to think of something new to draw for you. Just last night, you had found two new cans of ink for him, and he wanted to draw you a nice picture to express his gratitude. However, he was not used to drawing new things — especially things he hadn't seen multiple times before in his visions. He paced for hours, muttering incoherently, with such a seriousness that 8 peeked in once, was unnerved, and walked away.

Hopeless, 6 gazed up at the hung up pictures on his wall. It was now far different from what it used to look like. There were still dozens of his usual pictures of “the source” up there, but less than usual. In their place were other pictures from a noticeably different artist. Your drawings from last time of the dog and the sunny day were there, among several others you had made since that first day you'd drawn together.

6 looked upon them and felt happier than before, his anxiety levels decreasing vastly. He had needed to take down many of his old drawings to make space for yours, and taking away pictures of the source made him feel at ease. He wondered why he had never done it before, after everything became peaceful and there was no need for fear anymore. He still feared enough for everybody.

6 smiled as he examined every stroke you'd made to create the image of the dog. You were great at art — while others would struggle to transfer an image they'd had in their minds onto a sheet of paper, you didn't hesitate for a second, seeming to already know every touch needed before the ink touched the paper. 6 was amazed by your talents — so much in awe that he never once felt jealousy.

Your singing voice was also equally (if not more) amazing. You were reserved, but not shy, and he remembered how you had sung him to sleep one night, when he admitted his troubles with insomnia. He hadn't mentioned it was his fear for nightmares that kept him up, but your voice had taken care of that problem, too.

Whatever came up, you fixed it. Anxiety? Draw. Done. Sleep? Sing. Done. 8? Stay nearby. Done.

You were like a guardian angel, always there when he needed you. He was afraid to be away from you, for fear that all of his problems would suddenly rush back to him in an instant, and he'd be overwhelmed by it all. 6 wanted you to arrive, but he also wanted to finish this drawing desperately, because he wanted to have something, no matter how small, to give to you. He hoped he could brighten your day at least a little bit more. He didn't want your friendship to be parasitic or symbiotic—he wanted mutualism. But he didn't know how he could help you the way you helped him.

Finally, it clicked, and 6 had an idea. He got to work immediately, and after 5 tries and an hour of work, he had drawn it in a way that made him content. It was a picture of you, drawn in a flattering way, standing in 6's corner, and looking happy. It conveyed everything 6 wanted it to, and he hoped you would understand it.

5 had been up there to report to 1, and he stopped by to check up on 6. He was surprised to see the artist dancing around in joy with one of his drawings in his hand. 5 didn't want to bother him, especially when the stitchpunk looked so happy, but his curiosity got the better of him, and he had to ask for a look at the picture.

To his further astonishment, it was not one of 6's regular pictures. It wasn't of the source, or of anything similarly dark or disturbing. In fact, it looked like a happy image, and 5 discerned the character in the center of the paper as you. He was confused that 6 drew something so different from usual, and wondered why that could be—but he just smiled and praised 6 for the fine detail, and went off with his day, doing his best not to disturb the striped one. It was very rare that he was in such a good mood, and 5 hoped it would last him a long time.

Shortly after 5 left, you showed up. You were there every day without fail, and often for large portions of the day. He was glad to have finished his drawing before you arrived, and almost as soon as you had walked in, he excitedly held it up for you to see, seeking your approval.

You smiled—a rare occurrence, as your mind was often contemplating serious matters, or your attention drawn elsewhere. It warmed 6's heart (soul?), and he went to hand you the picture, but you stopped him.

"I want you to hang it up here," You stated, pointing at his wall. He tilted his head, confused.

"You don't... want it?"

You shook your head. "It's not that. I think I'll get to see it a lot more on your wall than I will lying around in my room."

6 lit up, your words implying that you were planning on sticking around him for a while. He was overwhelmed with joy, and he bounced with energy as he led you around to see his other drawings and rant on about random things, which he would never discuss with anyone else. If the others had heard how much he spoke to you, they would be shocked.

The time eventually came when you had to leave, to meet up with 7 as you had earlier promised. You assured 6 that you would return the next day, and after helping him put up his drawing on the wall, you left.

He knew you would keep your promise, but he still felt saddened that he would have to spend so many hours alone without you. It left him feeling empty and frightened, and he began to realize just how much he depended on you. 6 needed your presence — you made him happy and complete, and he admired you so much. He only hoped the day would pass quickly, so he could be in your company again soon.

8:

Glum, the guardian stitchpunk sat atop the stairs to the cathedral, his weapon lying beside him. He had his hands on the sides of his face, and his elbows on his knees, weary of this job. It wasn't the duty in particular that he had a problem with — it was just that his back was sore. It had felt this way for a while now, and he couldn't seem to push it aside. 1 had taken away his magnet because he deemed it distracting, and now 8 was grumpy and in pain. But he knew his place, and he didn't complain about it.

That was one of his best and most unacknowledged traits. Often the others didn't appreciate him for his good traits, and were very disapproving of him for his teasing of 6. He didn't see how it was so bad, and that made them dislike him even more.

His back was really sore. 8 wanted to go lay down, but he would be reprimanded by 1 again, and his magnet might not be returned for even longer. He would rather stay in pain for a little while than get a little relief, but have to wait longer to get his things back.

If only he could get one of your massages. The feeling was like magic — it made him feel lighter and at ease. Surely that would make his back feel better. But 1 wouldn't allow the two of you to be together when 8 was to be on watch; he claimed that you were too distracting.

His mind drifted from his massages to you. He was still puzzled about you, and continuously questioned why you came to see him so often. You visited him just about every day, claiming that you wanted to spend some time with him. The cheery affection you displayed was mind-boggling to him. He wasn't sure why you cared, since he didn't ever treat you differently than anyone else, and no one else ever seemed to like him the way you did. This was how you were towards everybody, he assumed, and put no more thought into it. He wasn't one for thinking things like this through — it just left him dissatisfied, confused, and with a headache.

Even so, you'd become a regular part of his day that he actually began looking forward to. Every so often he would glance at the sun's position in the sky, huffing in disappointment at times, as it would take forever before he would get to meet up with you again. Witnessing your innocent smile made him feel strangely good, even if he didn't smile back much. Often

he found it hard to respond back to you, because he felt the need to think through his actions carefully, which he had never felt the need to do before.

Even without the massage, being in your presence made him feel better. Without even touching him, he felt lighter, more content. Though, it also brought about an anxiousness he was not used to — he was rarely worried about anything, but he began to worry more about your safety, being outside of the Sanctuary, and being near him. As large as he was, he became afraid that he would accidentally hurt you — a strange fear that made him feel extremely vulnerable. But he didn't dislike it enough to stop spending time with you.

8 began to take his job even less seriously than before, just hoping for the time to pass by quickly until he could sit around aimlessly with you — to 1's displeasure.

1 was terribly frustrated with 8's lack of focus, and demanded an answer from him as to why. 1 used to be able to trust 8 with any sort of task, as he could expect full commitment to whatever it was — something so rarely undertaken by anyone else. However, 8 was now distracted, distant, and lost his ability to care about 1's orders. He still followed them, of course, but he questioned them more often than usual, which frightened his leader.

Though 1 demanded an answer, 8 could not give one. He knew something within him had changed, but he didn't know why he was different — nor was he interested enough to contemplate it.

So he simply went on with his everyday life, ignoring everyone else except you, and occasionally following 1's commands.

He rarely even bothered 6 anymore, often not even thinking much about the striped artist. He was calmer, and less bored, which contributed to it — but there was also the fact that 6 reminded him of you, and he still felt sick when he thought about taunting you the same way.

At some point later on in the day, 7 arrived at the front of the Sanctuary. 8 almost didn't notice her until she was ten feet away from him, distracted by his pain and his yearning for his magnet, and for you. She noticed his inattentiveness and frowned, sensing that something was up. Not that she particularly cared about 8 — she still had her grudges against him for his relationship with 1 and 6 — but she was concerned about what might make someone like him so lost in thought.

She brushed it aside and decided to tease him while his guard was down — best to avoid a fight if he was on edge.

“Hey. How's (Y/N)?”

He looked confused. “(Y/N)? Good? I think... Why?”

“The two of you spend a lot of time together, don't you? Looks cute. Do you like each other?”

8 felt some of that alien anxiety creeping back into him. It was so unnerving. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, right, I forgot who I’m talking to,” 7 sighed. She explained what she meant by ‘like’. It ruined the entertainment she would get from annoying him, but she was surprised by how long he took to seriously ponder the question.

You were definitely someone he cared a lot about, however irrationally it might be. And he was definitely worried about your well-being. He wanted more time with you, and it showed that he changed his actions because of you — his treatment of 6 and his attitude toward 1 were the most obvious examples.

But to categorize something as ‘love’ meant that it would be selfless, and he felt that his feelings for you were selfish instead, because of the good way it made him feel. He liked you because seeing you and being with you made him feel better, and he liked seeing you happy more than anything else. He didn’t think it could be considered love if it was impure, based on what *HE* wanted and liked rather than what *YOU* wanted and liked.

But even if that was the case, it didn’t change the fact that he ‘liked’ you a lot. Whether or not he ‘loved’, he was positive he had feelings for you beyond any normal relationship — at least, any of the other ones he had.

So, to 7’s surprise, he answered honestly and thoughtfully, without any hint of insincerity.

“I guess I do.”

9:

Construction paper of various colors were laid out across the floor in your room. 7 had found them on a scavenging trip and brought them back for 6, as a change of pace from his typical white sheets, but he was glad to share them with you. He didn’t ask why, either, which was a plus. If you had asked 7 to go get you some, she would, of course, without a doubt; however, she was nosy, and she would tease you for an answer as to why you needed it. And seeing as how it was for *HIM*, you couldn’t give her the chance to ask — one look at your face afterward and she would know for certain. And if 7 knew, 9 was sure to know just as soon, when she saw him next, winked suspiciously, and hinted to him about you.

So you made sure to shut your door, and saw to it that it wouldn’t be opened without your permission. You tore off the corner of a piece of construction paper and took a piece of scotch tape, and taped it to the makeshift door. Then you asked 6 to write “Knock” on the paper with his fingers, and it was all set.

Once inside, you rolled a brick (which 8 had helped you carry inside a while ago) against your door, keeping it from being opened. You also piled rocks on top of it, for extra measure.

With this barricade complete, you got to work. You had been working on a gift for 9, and now it was nearing completion, hence the construction paper (which you planned to use as wrapping paper). It was a simple crocheted bear — a cute one, which would soon be filled

with stuffing so it would be soft, too. 9 had been amazed the other day when you, he, and 7 had found this little boy's room in an abandoned house, filled with stuffed animals. He had laughed so much upon feeling the soft, furry creatures, and you wanted him to be able to have something soft in the meantime. Eventually you wanted to be able to make something of a higher quality — or find something small that would work — but until then, this would do. ... At least, you hoped.

If you screwed it up, or even made the tiniest mistake, it wouldn't be fit enough for 9. You wanted him to have the best present in the world, and you tried your best to make it that. It was incredibly infuriating, especially when you had to start all over. But it would be worth it. Anything would be worth it for him.

Two knocks on your door snapped you out of your thoughts, and you gazed down at your hands, realizing that, in your carelessness, you'd made the stitches too wide. Annoyed, you groaned and threw it on the bed, stomping towards the door.

"Who is it?!"

"Uh, it's me... 9."

If you had a heart, it would have stopped. It was him!! He was there!!

You would have thrown open the door right then, but you remembered the gift was lying right there on the bed. Freaking out, you grabbed the half-made bear and tossed it under the bed. You'd have to start over anyway, so if you lost your place, it wouldn't matter; all that mattered was getting to see *HIM* again.

You composed yourself at the door; then, with a sudden voracity, threw all of the rocks behind you and rolled the brick out of the way. When you finally opened the door, you were panting from the exertion. Your face felt like fire as your optics rested upon his. He smiled warmly, and you felt your composure had completely abandoned you. But he seemed relatively relaxed, if not just a teeny bit embarrassed.

"H-Hi, 9..."

"Hey, (Y/N). I want to go out..." You pinched your arm. "... beyond the Sanctuary, to scout out some of those other houses we noticed last time. I was hoping you might want to come along. Are you free?"

'I'm always free for you,' You wished you could say — but you weren't confident enough for such a bold statement. So you merely squeaked out, "Y-Y-Yeah, I'm free... I c-can b-be there soon... G-Gimme a minute to get ready!!"

You practically slammed the door in his face, giving him quite the shock. But he simply relaxed and waited patiently for you to reappear.

You stood on the other side of the door for a full ten seconds before opening the door again. You had just needed to compose yourself — and, as hard as it was, you managed such a persona.

9 smiled. He had heard no movement from behind the door, and correctly assumed what had happened. You were so quirky and cute, he almost laughed, but he didn't want you to question him afterwards. He would have to fumble for a response that didn't betray his feelings.

It was definitely the right choice to ask you, and he was happy that you had accepted. Not only were you nice to be around, and more adorable than anyone else, but he felt like he could trust you with anything, and that went a long way. He hoped he could get to know you better on this mission; out of everyone, you were the one who sparked his interest the most.

Sure, 2 and 5 were great, and 7 was a loyal comrade, but you made him feel happier than they ever could. It was something no one else could imitate. No one else was as pure, sweet, selfless, brave, talented, and cute.

“W-Well... Let's go, then.”

You closed your door and began walking, eyeing him expectantly. 9 stumbled, so lost in thought that he almost fell, and sped up so you were walking side-by-side.

9 felt nervous, but overpowering that nervousness was a deep admiration for you, who, as he noted, fidgeted anxiously as you walked. You were brave, but easily embarrassed, and every time you were, he could hardly handle how cute you acted.

He paused to think over this feeling. Was it really... more than friendship? He had always admired you, since the moment you met; he was thankful for the opportunity to get to know you, and he had always sought out moments when you would be able to do tasks together, whether going out into the Emptiness or just helping out 2 with whatever he needed. 9 spent more of his time with you or trying to find time to be with you than he did willingly hanging out with 5 and 2 put together.

But now, it was more than just admiration and gratitude — he found himself in love with every movement you made, every word you spoke, every face you made. 9 knew it was true — he loved you. The thought made himself feel even more nervous as he walked beside you.

It was difficult, and 9 struggled to compose himself, hoping the feelings he had deep inside weren't seeping through the stitches.

IV {When He Reveals His Feelings For You}

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1:

It didn't take long for you to notice he wasn't acting right.

The next time you went into his throne room to read, he ignored you for a decent amount of time, and then left without a word. You waited for a good couple hours, but he never returned, so you left.

He did the same thing when you entered to spend some time with 6.

The small artist was similar to 1 in that they both seemed misunderstood and alone, and that was why you originally chose to meet up with them. But 6 was also someone who you didn't have to interact with much when you were around him — you could just lay down and take a nap as he drew, and he would at least have company.

When you entered 6's space, 1 was definitely sitting upon his throne. But when you peeked out in the middle of your nap, he was gone.

It was definitely strange — and it only took those two occurrences for you to realize he was acting weird because of you. When you were out, 1 rarely left, if not for a very important matter (which was rarely ever, since there was not much going on), but when you showed up, he hurried out for seemingly no reason. You wondered what you had done wrong to make him like this, but couldn't think of anything.

What you didn't know was that his confrontation with 2, and his bitter acknowledgement of his feelings for you, was what sparked this change, and now he was trying to avoid you at all costs. 1 mistakenly believed that if he pushed you out of his life, if he refused to give you any thought or attention, he would squash these unnecessary feelings before they took root.

However, this backfired on him. 1 was getting strange looks every time he strolled down the hall for no apparent reason. Not only that, but he was getting more and more miserable, having to keep up this facade, and putting so much effort and thought into avoiding you. He seemed absent-minded most of the time, and though 7 was satisfied that his temper had calmed a bit, 2 was not content.

2 had begun to notice 1's change shortly after his talk with him. He had hoped his teasing wasn't the cause, but now he was only too sure of it. He spent much of his free time thinking about how he could fix this, but ultimately decided he shouldn't get into 1's business any more, and instead resolved to let things happen naturally.

A few days passed by — quickly for most of the stitchpunks, but slow and torturous for their leader. You were spending more and more time with 6, and that meant 1 had to leave his throne room to keep his distance. At least, that was what he told himself.

It did bother you that 1 was distancing himself, but you were mostly content replacing your time you'd meant for him with 6. You rather liked 6 — he was pleasant, and very hard to find fault with. Still, something was missing.

Deciding to give 1 some space, you promised 6 you would leave the Sanctuary to retrieve ink for him in a house a couple days' walk away.

You had meant to go on your own, but on your way you passed by 7, and you asked her to accompany you. She accepted, as you had no doubt she would, glad that you were “showing some backbone”, in her words. Knowing she was referring to you disobeying 1's orders — he would never approve of your actions — you didn't respond.

You knew 1 would be upset if he knew, and that ***DID*** matter to you. But it was his choice to ignore you, and so it was only fair to ignore him back. You would be back before he knew it, anyway.

1 hummed an old tune to himself as he traveled down the hallway, hands clasped behind his bent back as he walked.

Typically he wouldn't be out and about at the same time as you, but he had wanted to question 2 about something that was bothering him, so he took the opportunity to stretch his legs. He didn't come across any of the others through the hall, which pleased him. Things seemed rather quiet, and he hoped it would stay that way.

His wish did not come true, however, as shortly later he was made aware of some sort of commotion up ahead, near the main entrance. There were loud and concerned yells, from several of the stitchpunks. Though 1 could not hear what was said, he easily recognized the voices of 7 and 9, along with some quieter ones.

All too familiar was the anxiety that coursed through him, making his body tremble and his breathing quicken. Who knew what had happened — was there a Beast? Had the Machine returned? Was someone injured? Were they all in danger?

1 hurried forward until he reached the part of the corridor where the others were gathered. He had missed the crucial moment of their gathering, so he was left confused and annoyed when he saw everyone begin to scatter. 6 scurried past him, casting him a fearful glance, and 9 followed hesitantly, looking back only once. 8 went to the front of the Sanctuary, and the twins were still at the library.

1 almost went after 9 to demand knowledge of what had happened, but he didn't need to. Looking at the remaining three, who were headed in the opposite direction, it was clear what had caused such a ruckus.

7 was carrying you on her back, and 2 walked behind you, his arms out to catch you if you slipped off. 5 had run ahead to prepare 2's lab for stitching. A nail about the size of your body had impaled you through the torso at a horrible angle — a horrid one to look at, but a lucky one. By a stroke of luck, it was protruding through you so oddly that it wouldn't likely have damaged your voice box or any other important inner components. Still, you weren't moving, your body slack and your optics dark and still. Whether it injured your important parts or not, the shock of it might have killed you altogether — 1 couldn't possibly know. All he could be sure of was, you were badly injured (which must have happened out in the Emptiness, all things considered — you were at the entrance where no nails would be carelessly placed, 7 was carrying you, and you hadn't shown up anywhere all day), and he had no way of knowing whether or not you could be fixed.

1 was frozen in place, unable to believe what he was seeing, and what this meant. But once the others were almost out of his sight, he gathered himself and followed them to where you were laid down for the operation. 5 was shaking, as he positioned you on your knees on the floor. He and 2 held you there while 7 pulled the nail out — something that looked to take quite a lot of energy out of her — and threw it aside. Then, 2 and 5 gently laid you on a table, and 2 opened your zipper to check inside for any injured parts.

7 was huffing as she sat on the floor, gazing up at the two as they examined you and prepared to work. 1 stepped into the room and scowled at her. “7. I demand that you tell me at once. What were you doing out there? Why did this happen?”

7's body tensed up, and she stood, ready for a verbal war. “She went to get 6 some ink and asked me to tag along. It's not her fault, and it's not mine, so don't you dare suggest we had this coming. All she did was trip and fall in the wrong place. It was an accident.”

“An accident that could have been prevented, had you not gone out.”

7 was furious, but 2 suddenly interrupted before she could unleash her rage. “Now's not the time. Both of you, get out. We have this under control, but we need to focus, and we can't do that with the two of you screaming at each other. Leave it to us.”

7 gave 1 one last glare, then hurried out of the room. She sprinted down the corridor, and turned out of the front entrance to the Sanctuary — into the Emptiness, where she could be alone to calm herself down.

1 gazed at your painfully still body, an overwhelming emotion building up in him, that he tried to drown out. He didn't plan on leaving. But then 5 glanced up at him, with a weird

frown and a searching eye, and 1 knew he had no good reason to stay — he would just be questioned, and he couldn't let anyone else know.

He forced himself to exit the room, cursing 7 for letting you leave, cursing you for choosing to go, cursing himself for being such a fool. As much as he wanted to pass the blame onto 7 or you, he knew it was his fault for ignoring you. Perhaps if he hadn't done so... if he had paid more attention to you... you wouldn't have taken this on yourself. Maybe you would have followed his orders, and asked 7 to do it instead. 1 had to bear the blame of letting this happen to you.

He snuck in several times that day to witness your condition, hoping for some sort of obvious improvement, which never seemed to come. 5 noticed him one of these times, and related the incident to 2.

The next time 1 came, 2 spotted him, and, sensing his hidden worry, told him to come in.

1 hesitantly entered, remarking, "What a foolish thing to do. Let this be a lesson to both of you never to follow in those foolish girls' footsteps."

2 smiled. "Oh, come on, 1. I know you're just worried."

"Of course not." He denied it, with the accompanying motion of the wave of his hand.

"Why would you have come all this way to check up on her if you aren't? Especially multiple times, if 5 is to be believed."

5 looked aghast at the mentioning of his name, and faced 2 with an expression of utter betrayal. 2 ignored him and watching 1's flustered face as he grasped for an excuse for his actions.

"1, it's not shameful or foolish to care about someone. I hope you begin to feel that way more. It's a good kind of change."

"Change is never good!" 1 argued.

"But you don't deny you care about (Y/N)?" 2 prodded. 1 scoffed, but couldn't come up with a strong and quick response.

At that moment, you began to move. You carefully sat yourself up on the table, holding yourself there with shaking hands. 1 gasped when he saw you move without warning, your face just as calm as ever, even though your body was weak and pained, exerting itself a lot just to sit up. Your eyes met 1's and they softened, a relaxed smile filling your face.

2 grabbed 5 by the arm and began heading for the door. "We'll give 1 some time to lecture (Y/N). Give us a call if something comes up."

Before 1 could process what had just happened, 2 and 5 were long gone, leaving the two of you alone in the room.

You didn't look like you were going to start talking anytime soon — you looked at peace, as if you could sit there watching him in silence all day without a complaint. Grumpily, I initiated the conversation.

“You should not have done that. You put yourself in danger, for no just cause.”

“Maybe you'd see it that way. But I think it was worth it.”

“How could it be? You failed at your task — 7 could not possibly have carried both you and the ink back at once.”

“Oh, no — we hadn't even gotten to that yet.” You closed your eyes and laid back down.

“But I did get one thing out of it. You're not avoiding me any more.”

“Tch.” I turned away — of course you'd noticed. It wasn't as if he'd hid it very well, and you were quite observational. What could he have expected? What a fool, what a fool...

“And thank you for caring.”

He cringed. Everything was falling apart. His plan, his mask, his pride... All of it was disappearing, all because of this one cheeky girl.

Still, he couldn't bring himself to lie and hide it from you. First of all, the heat he felt in his face — albeit non-visible — was making him lose his careful judgement. Secondly, you already knew. That much had been made perfectly clear by your statement. “... Y-Yes, well..... Be more careful. It's dangerous outside these walls. I can do nothing to protect you out there.”

“No, I'm done with being outside,” You assured him. “After all, you're not going to abandon me again, right?”

“Abandon?” His optics grew wide. “I... I would never call it *THAT*...”

“Are you?”

He stared at you, completely silent as he gauged just how serious your question was. Your eyes were steady, without a hint of humor in them. He responded equally.

“... No. I won't.”

You smiled, and I couldn't understand at first why. Then he realized you were relieved. You wanted him to care. You weren't against his feelings — you didn't want him to push himself away. You wanted... him.

The thought of it was so terrifying and relieving and unbelievable all at the same time, and he wasn't sure how to react. How could he? He had never prepared himself for something like this.

Satisfied, you forced yourself onto your side, wincing as you did so. You managed to curl up into a ball and close your eyes, allowing yourself to rest.

After a few minutes, 1 hesitantly approached you, mistakenly assuming you had already drifted away. He stroked your arm — lightly, so that he wouldn't wake you — and murmured, "I promise to keep you safe... so long as you stay here with me, where I can protect you."

You smiled.

And this time, he saw it.

2:

"Here... huff... 2... huff... look at this," 7 called out as she pulled with all her might. 2 was pleasantly surprised by the object in question as she dragged it from the corridor into his room.

He laughed cheerfully, kneeling beside it and touching it, checking to see if it was still functional. It seemed to be fine, but he would have to test it out later to be sure. "Where did you *find* this?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you. Let's just say I'm surprised it's in such a decent condition. Think it's usable?" Her voice sounded hopeful. 2 nodded, and she radiated pride.

"Yes. I'll have to check if the batteries still work or not, but even if it can't be used right now, I'm positive it won't be for nothing." 2 glanced over to the corner of the room. "Think you can help me push it over there?"

"Sure."

They both stood on the shorter end of the large, black-and-yellow Polaroid, and began to direct it toward the empty corner. When they were done, 7 looked absolutely exhausted. It certainly must have been a long trip, and with such a big object in tow (large when compared to their puny sizes, at least). 2 made sure to show his gratitude — he would certainly find some use for it.

Humanity may have destroyed much, but what they could create was so admirable. 2 wished he could have been alive to witness the good of the human race, rather than its greatest mistakes, followed by its complete annihilation. It was quite a shame.

7 leaned against the side of the camera and began a casual conversation with 2. It mostly dealt with the common subjects of their newest inventions, 1's tyranny, the steadily improving beauty of nature, whatever the twins were learning, and whatever else had happened lately to catch their attention. It was not much, but it brought peace and regularity to their strange everyday lives.

And then, when all of the other topics were through, 7 finally could contain herself no more, and she brought up you. He'd let it slip that he liked you in a conversation a while back, and

7 had never let it go. He didn't blame her — it wasn't in her nature to let things slide, no matter what the subject was. But it grew more and more annoying, as he only wanted to ignore what he felt and move on.

2 smiled at the mention of your name, but tried not to talk too much about you. However, 7 refused to give in. She felt that it was absolutely necessary for him to reveal his feelings. Sure, it was partially for herself — she loved the idea of her two close friends getting together. But she believed it would help both of you. 2, on the other hand, was certain it would only make things **WORSE** for the both of you.

“If I thought any good would come of it, you can be sure I would do something about it. But, 7, I'm old. I'm weak. And (Y/N) doesn't need to be intimate with someone like me.”

“Oh, come on, 2. Stop being so hard on yourself. Of course (Y/N) would want you — you're great. You would look so cute together, just give it a chance.”

“7. Let it go,” 2 responded gently, and 7 huffed in disappointment. “I'm satisfied with how our friendship is going right now. I wouldn't want to change a thing about it. And I know (Y/N) would be better off with someone else, if she wanted to be with someone.”

7 tried once again to get through to him, but he brushed her off once more, and started to examine the Polaroid more closely, distracting himself from her pestering.

Over the past few weeks, 2 had gotten even closer to you than he'd been before. It was something he was proud of. He'd taken it upon himself to search for you every day, and you had finally opened up to him. Now you sought him out as well, and rarely did a day go by without you spending hours in the same room together.

2 managed to sneak in any bit of time he could find for the two of you. Sometimes he just asked you to help him with something, or you shared your thoughts with him on whatever he was making. Sometimes you taught him something he hadn't known before, or simply shared a story you'd read with him.

Sometimes you went out scavenging or exploring together. Those days were the most intriguing, although 2 didn't venture out as much as he'd like to. Whenever he did, he liked to invite you, and on the times when you'd say yes, he would find that he could learn a great deal from just observing you. He admired your natural stealth, and asked to learn your secrets and tricks. Because he was the second oldest creation, of course, he was not able to do everything as quickly and easily as you could, but he was content to do what he could and watch you do everything else. It was like watching an artist at work.

2 admired several things about you. Not just your skill, but also you as a person. You were softhearted and affectionate whenever you were close, though you kept your distance, because you were so used to being alone. You were independent and intelligent, brave and adventurous, able to do anything on your own. But with this independence came a price — a terrible loneliness.

It was clear to him just how much pain it gave you, but you could bear it all with a strength he could never possess. You always seemed down, but you never once complained. He

admired your resilience.

Another aspect of yours that he loved was that you sought knowledge constantly, whether in a book or in the Emptiness. You were just as curious as he was, which let him grow closer to you. He loved that he could be himself around you. Not that he ever hid his true nature, but he could never have a conversation about his passions with anyone except 5 without boring them. Even 7 couldn't entertain herself for long — she would rather be out moving.

Even now, she was growing impatient. Bored, she leaned out and peered into the hall, where she witnessed the sight of you running by, face scrunched up as if upset by something. She blinked in surprise, then retold the incident to 2.

“(Y/N)...? Really?!” He jumped up upon hearing your condition, a deep concern flooding his soul. He hurried out of the room, asking 7 to lead him where she'd seen you run off.

They ended up near your room, and 2 knew instinctively that you were in there. It was your safe little haven, where no one would disturb you — or so it should have been. But, in fact, it was the opposite — a dangerous dark space where you would be plagued by your own mind, with no one to distract you.

2 felt his heart racing as 7 knocked on your door, loud enough that you must have heard. There was no response, and so she knocked again, even louder. Neither of them budged as they awaited your response.

Finally, you opened the door, peeking out with a timid face. If stitchpunks could cry, you would have tears streaming down your face. It hurt 2's soul to see you in so much pain.

“(Y/N), what's wrong?” 7 asked with gentle concern. You noticed 2 just then and hid a bit more behind the door.

“... I just... made a mistake. And I angered 5... But everything's fine...”

The last line was clearly a lie, but instead of refuting it, 2 and 7 were put off guard by the previous statement. 5 wasn't one to get angry. He was one of the most forgiving and patient of them all, and they could count on five fingers how many times they'd seen 5 upset — and all of them were towards himself, due to something he'd thought he'd done wrong.

2 made a note to himself to question 5 about it later. Maybe you were just exaggerating, but he couldn't believe that you would do anything to upset him that much.

“I promise you, whatever happened, it's going to be all right,” 7 stated, though her tone sounded unsure at first. She quickly fixed this as she continued. “I'm sure 5 is perfectly calm right now, and I know he can't be too mad at you. So don't worry about it.”

You gave her a small, doubtful nod, then repeated yourself with a quiet murmur of “It's fine”, and closed the door abruptly.

7 stepped away from it thoughtfully. 2 was just as perplexed.

“What do you think could have happened?” 2 asked.

“I don’t know,” 7 replied. “I’m going to go ask 5. I’ll tell you later if I see you before he does.”

She waved silently before running down the corridor and disappearing from his line of vision. 2 was left alone outside your door, where he waited, contemplating his next move. He decided to let 7 figure out what the deal was with 5, but that meant he was left with two choices — attempt to comfort or question you, or leave you be for a while. Though he answer seemed obvious, he felt nervous to do it. But it would be wrong to leave you alone.

2 knocked on your door again. “(Y/N)? Is it all right if I come in?”

There was a quiet pause. “... Yes.”

With a light intake of breath, 2 opened the door and entered.

You were sitting on your bed with your knees pulled up to your chest. 2 chose to sit down on the bed beside you, where he reflected his options once again. Sit in silence, or initiate a conversation. Silence might be nicer and more natural, but he deemed some answers and distractions as more necessary.

“It’s not just 5 that upset you.”

You gave him a look of shock, but it quickly morphed into a slightly-disappointed, slightly-ashamed expression, with your eyes cast downward.

“You’re right...” You rubbed your arm self-consciously. “It was just... the last straw, I guess...?”

2 gazed down at your cowering position with a frown. “(Y/N), tell me. What have you been holding inside of you all this time?”

“It’s fine. I’m just overreacting...”

“It’s normal to talk out your problems with someone who cares about you, (Y/N). You shouldn’t hide yourself from them.”

You stared at him blankly. “No one cares about me.”

“Now, you know that’s not true.” 2 took a deep breath. “I do.”

Your eyes widened, and you searched him for some sign of lying, or of a joke. But he seemed serious, if not hesitant or worried. Was it really true...? Did he... really care?

Of everyone, it would make the most sense. No one else ever paid any attention to you, but 2... he was different. He seemed to want to be with you, and it always made you feel warm inside. Even now, you felt that familiar warmth emanating from within, although you felt simultaneously nervous. It was a strange, abnormal sort of nervousness — nothing like your everyday anxiousness.

“Why?”

2 chuckled. “Well, why not? You need to give yourself more credit than you do.” And he began to give you the reasons why.

He gave you all of the compliments he’d been holding back — his admiration for your skills, for your bravery, for your intellect and your mental fortitude. His love for your curiosity, your affectionate behavior, your humble nature. With each new favorable word and phrase he used to describe you, you felt your heart lift, and your previous worries melted away.

“And it’s not just me. 7 cares for you too, you know,” He added. “We’re always here for you when you need us. We’re friends.”

Your shoulders fell in disappointment. Your smile remained on your face, but the sudden twist of the subject made you less joyful. It was as if he’d immediately friendzoned you as soon as he made you feel loved. But it wasn’t like you didn’t understand — you would be amazed if he truly did care for you as much as you were growing to care for him. It was one of your greatest flaws.

2 noticed how upset you looked even though your smile didn’t disappear, and stopped speaking. He realized it was crucial that he make you comprehend exactly how he felt, so you didn’t misunderstand.

“(Y/N). Please listen.” He sighed. “I don’t just care for you as a friend, either. I really do... love you.” You gasped. He spoke quicker to get to his point. “And I want you to be happy, because I know you deserve it. So... please don’t feel as if you’re unloved. Know that you are, and try to be happy for it.”

You were stunned into silence. It shouldn’t have been that big of a surprise to you, but it really and truly was. Your modesty and negative self-esteem made it too hard for you to believe it before, so you’d brushed it aside as something your mind was making up for pleasure. But now he was confirming it. This couldn’t be a lie... could it?

“I understand if you don’t feel the same,” 2 continued gently, wanting to make his perspective clear. “It’s all right. I don’t expect it from you. But you can’t keep saying no one cares for you. Unless you’re implying that I’m no one.”

It was a joke, which he said with a sorrowful smile, but you didn’t smile back. You were still processing all of this, still in a state of shock. Later on you would torment yourself for not assuring him you felt the same.

2 hugged you. “Please... at least let me in as a friend. I at least want to be that, if nothing else. Someone you can confide in, rather than stay all alone. Can you accept that?”

You were unable to tell him the truth — it was too soon, and you couldn’t bring yourself to do it just yet.

But, you could at least do this. For him, and for you.

“Yes... I’ll let you in. I promise.”

3:

The weather gradually yet steadily declined as time passed on. At first, the others were concerned that the weather might be worsening due to unnatural causes, but some reading convinced the twins that that was not the case. They determined that the seasons were merely shifting, and that winter was approaching. Snow had not occurred in a long time, but since it had rained recently and the world seemed to be improving since, there was hope that you'd all be able to experience your first snow. ... Your first **GENTLE** snow, that is. None of you — not even the twins, as excited for the winter as they were — were interested in five-foot piles of snow trapping them in the library for months. It would be too dangerous to travel to the Sanctuary — if anyone fell through the snow, or it piled on top of them, they might not be able to get out for a long, long time.

You couldn't risk it. The thought of any of your group being lost, hurt, isolated, or endangered made you more nervous than anything. And you couldn't risk the journey yourself and leave them behind. So everyone prepared for the worst, and made plans with the other community in case you lost contact for a while.

On one of the colder days than usual, you were outside training with your scissors blade in your hand. You had created an obstacle course for yourself using the rubble from broken statues and other material you found lying around, like cement blocks and torn up books. After sharpening your blade for a while, you practiced various stances and poses, imagining different ways a Beast could come at you, and how you might dodge, defend, or destroy it. You were working up a good sweat out there, while 7 and the twins were huddled up inside, safe and sound.

As you took a short break to reposition the objects on the field, your exhausted mind drifted off. 3 appeared in your mind — the small, curious stitchpunk you'd grown to care for the most. You thought of his cute little knowing smile, and how he had come to spend his evenings with you, sitting on the top of those stairs, watching the gray sky above. He'd shown you a video of a sunset before. A black-and-white video could not capture the supposed beauty of it, but you could sense the peace of the moment anyway. You supposed that was why he sat out with you every day on those stairs, gazing up at the sky, wondering when the gray would brighten into blue, and the sun would suddenly appear, glowing vibrantly, filling them with warmth and hope, even in the cold winter.

You realized you were beginning to lose yourself in your head. You straightened up, narrowing your eyes as you peered around — but there was no one watching, no one planning a strike. There never was. Not anymore. Part of you wished you could relax, like 3. You'd be more happy, you knew, but if something ever happened, and he got hurt, the blame would be on you. Out of all of them, 3 getting hurt would have hurt you most. You tried not to think of why.

You tried to block your thoughts and focus on your surroundings, but it was becoming more and more difficult by the day. You would think more and more about 3 — what he'd been up

to lately, where he was at the moment, when you'd last seen him, how cute he looked when he smiled up at you.

The thoughts were intrusive and annoying. You tried to convince yourself that you were just doing your job, protecting him — that you cared more about that than actually being with him. But the cold was beginning to reach you, he was still occupying your mind, and being inside the library at the moment was a very pleasing thought.

Meanwhile, inside, 7 was assisting 3 with wrapping his gift for you. She had torn out pages of an already illegible, half-destroyed book, and wrapped layers and layers of pages around the small gift to secure it. 4 was eyeing the paper-wrapped gift with skeptical eyes. He wasn't sure that the gift would be understood, nor if 7 had wrapped it well enough. He tried to add more paper, but she insisted that it was fine, so he let his shoulders fall and reluctantly backed away.

3 took one look at his twin, and the uncertainty he saw built upon his own. He twiddled his fingers anxiously and gazed up at 7, searching her face for similar signals, but she only looked proud as she smiled down at him and patted the top of his head.

“Trust me, (Y/N) will definitely appreciate it. Stop looking so nervous! You'll make her worried!”

3's spirits rose, but the doubt still lingered. He hoped that you would understand, and that he could communicate his feelings for you, but he just wasn't sure he was capable of it. Words could work wonders — even if they couldn't speak like the others, 3 and 4 knew that language was powerful. They spent all their time in a library, after all! They knew they were hindered socially because they didn't talk. But 3 had never been disturbed by that, never — until he met you.

He could have sworn he felt his soul thump as he thought of your reaction. More than anything, he wanted it to be good. He didn't know what he'd do if it wasn't.

It was finally time; 3 was pressured by 7 to head out and present the gift to you. She practically pushed him the whole way to the door, then backed up to give him some space. You were sitting down on the top stair, staring out into the Emptiness. 3 couldn't help but think that you looked so cool, so determined, so confident — he couldn't help but admire you. But he also thought you looked like the loneliest person in the world.

3 turned around and saw 7 standing several feet back, arms on her hips, with 4 slightly behind, holding on to her left arm. The twin gave 3 a hesitant nod, telling him to go on. 3 nodded back, and turned back toward you.

It was always nerve-racking, approaching you. At first it was due to fear, but now it was a different kind of nervousness. But he didn't stop, not with 4 and 7 staring at his back as he went.

Finally he reached you, but you didn't notice he was there. He hadn't intended to, but he'd snuck up from behind, since he couldn't make a warning call.

3 also hadn't realized surprising you might cause a problem.

You had been in the middle of a daydream, involving you and 3 and a sunset, when you sensed his approach. You heard the light footstep from close behind that snapped you back into reality, and when you spun around, you nearly jabbed him in the stomach with your blade. 3 jumped backward with fear shining in his eyes, a sight that made guilt fester in your soul. He tripped on the uneven ground and fell, but was otherwise unhurt. You put down your blade and extended your hand out to him, helping him stand back up.

"I'm sorry," you whispered, realizing that you had likely broken the trust of the one who meant the most to you. All this time, you had been developing a strong companionship, and now you had messed it up. You were upset beyond words. Language couldn't convey how strongly you felt.

3 tried to tell you that he was fine, but he was struggling with a variation of the same problem. He grabbed your hand and shook it gently, looking up into your eyes, but you mistook the worried look for a remnant of fear, and pulled away.

When 3 had fallen, 4's grip on 7's arm tightened, with a force she hadn't known was capable in the small stitchpunk. He looked more worried than before, and about ready to spring towards his twin to help. 7 tightened her grip on him in turn, but inwardly relaxed as soon as 3 stood back up with your help.

"It's fine," she told 4, patting his shoulder. "They have this handled."

It was at that moment that you noticed the paper-wrapped object 3 was holding in his hands. He smiled brightly and held it out to you. You were confused, but you took it anyway and began to unwrap it, noting that he became more eager and antsy as you did so.

When you got to the center, you picked up the item in your right hand and stared at it curiously. It was part of a nylon strap. You had used this before to help you sharpen your scissor blade, since it was easy for you to carry, but you had lost it somewhere in the building a long while ago. You couldn't recall telling anyone about it — it was something he must have noticed on his own.

"Thank you," you told him, watching the smile grow on his face. Still, you didn't completely understand. Why would he do something like this for you? How did he remember about the strap in the first place? And even more puzzling — why did he bother wrapping it all up and making a big deal out of handing it back to you? It was cute, and it made you happy, but it seemed to be a lot of work to go through for you. You wondered what the point was.

He shyly embraced you — his arms wrapped slowly around your torso, but then held on tightly, and you gasped at the sudden unexpected contact. He couldn't use words, but the universal language of hugs did not require explanation. You felt a nervous twinge in your stomach, thinking that you understood, but not entirely sure. You looked to 7, and she grinned back at you, making a heart with her hands.

‘So it’s true,’ you thought, astonished. Hesitantly you hugged him back, conflicted feelings tugging at you from within. You had never expected to feel attached to someone, because that’s not the kind of person you thought you were. But being with 3 always felt right and comfortable, and you were almost positive you felt just as deeply for him as he felt for you — or more. But still, you weren’t used to this emotion. It was new, and terrifying, and you needed time to adjust, to figure out how you were supposed to act, now that you knew. It was a lot to take in.

Even so, you hugged 3 back, just as tightly — because, as confused as you were, you knew for sure that you didn’t want to ever let him go.

4:

4 shuffled in place as he half-listened to 7’s advice. They were deep in the library, away from 3 at the moment, who was watching his twin curiously from afar, a magnifying glass at his feet. You were not there at the time; you had gone back to the Sanctuary out of boredom, to pester the others and bounce some interesting game or prank ideas off of 2. He was surprisingly goofy at heart, and had an unexpectedly sharp wit. The others were nowhere near as fun — 1 and 8 were sour apples, 6 was... well, 6, and 5 and 9 were awkward and eager to please. You could tell sometimes when they smiled that they didn’t quite understand the joke, but they didn’t care enough to ask, and when they joined in on the conversation, it just wasn’t the same amount of fun as you and 2 talking back and forth, because more explanation would be needed.

Not that you didn’t enjoy them, but you had a problem with boredom. It was part of why you were such a hyper person — you couldn’t stand feeling like you were bored out of your mind. It was annoying and tiresome when you allowed that feeling to set in, so you didn’t let it.

Since you were gone, but they were expecting you back shortly, 4 had sought out 7’s help, desperate to gain control over his feelings for you. He’d somehow managed to communicate this to her, despite his bundle of nerves. But her advice wasn’t what he wanted to hear, and now he was beginning to regret not going to his twin instead.

“You’ll never feel any better if you keep it all to yourself. You’ll always wonder, ‘What if I had let her know?’ ‘What if she liked me, too?’ ‘What if I waited too long?’” 7 smiled down at him, placing her hands on his shoulders. “Tell (Y/N) how you feel, in your own way. You don’t have to speak to get your message across. Tell her, and trust me, you’ll feel much better.”

4’s chest fell, slightly comforted. He nodded, and ducked under 7’s arms to escape the conversation, when she added, “It’s better to be rejected than to always wish you’d said something, but miss your chance.”

‘Rejection?!’

4 felt any bit of confidence deflate, as he sagged across the floor to meet his twin. The idea of being rejected by you was more than enough to tip his decision. Your face appeared in his mind — a wide, mocking grin as you brushed off his heartfelt confession, and sauntered away toward the nonfiction section.

He closed his eyes and shook his head wildly, like a dog coming in from the rain. 3 glanced at him in concern, before shrugging it off and continuing to stare through the magnifying glass.

Time continued to pass. Days turned into weeks, and 7 was beginning to grow just as weary as 3 was with 4's meekness. She tried to convince 4 several times to just express his feelings, but he refused. You came back to the library for several weeks, rarely ever leaving the walls, except for on rare occasions when you were bored and decided to climb the gates or statues and give 4 a heart attack. Not once did he attempt to tell you of his deep crush on you. You spent some days reading thick books together, deciding to spend a week on a fantasy genre — not really either of your main interests, but a good read nonetheless. You told him stories about the others at the Sanctuary — the major cleaning and bedroom renovations that were underway to make more their lives more comfortable; the relentless drama going on between 1 and 2, which no one knew quite the cause of, nor did they know when it would end or by whom; the terrifying ghost stories 6 had shared around their miniature “campfire” (which really was just a candle they had found and lit with matches, but still); the near-death experience involving 5, 9, and a falling lamp; and more. 4 listened with intense curiosity to the retelling of the ghost stories, but found himself zoning out to the other gossip, content with listening to the sweet sound of your joyful voice. But when he saw 7 in the distance, tapping her feet against the wooden floor with a disappointed frown, he felt his fabric heat up and zoomed out of the area, leaving you there in shock, wondering what you could have said about dominoes to have scared him that badly.

Eventually, a week came when you decided to return back to the Sanctuary. 4 still hadn't given you a heart-to-heart, and as he watched you disappear over the horizon, he felt his soul sag within him.

During the time you were absent, days seemed to pass as slow as snails, and 4 was as glum and lethargic as he had ever been. 3 and 7 had gotten in an argument once — possibly the only real time 3 and 7 had turned against one another — and 4 had begun to ignore them both. He thought about you often those days, reminiscing over the times you introduced them to shadow puppets, read stories with them, climbed bookshelves and hopped off with handmade parachutes... With you, there were no fights, just beauty and intrigue and always something new and exciting. 4 knew he wanted to be with you, and he knew that the next time you left, he wanted to go, too.

One day, he went near the library's entrance to take a look outside. He'd spend some hours every day looking out from within, waiting for your figure to appear in the distance. But 7 was waiting for him this time, blocking his view. Her hands were on her hips, her feet both planted firmly. Her eyes were stern, but also compassionate, as she leaned forward to gaze into his optics.

"Are you sure you don't need a little push? I can see how much this is bothering you, 4. You don't have to hide it, you know."

4 looked down and shrugged in defeat. He wasn't sure what he needed, or if he could even do it in the first place. How could he even tell you, and make sure you really understood? He just didn't know.

A sudden movement in the distance caught his attention. The sight of familiar fabric made his soul dance with joy, but also filled it with nervous butterflies. Your smile came into view, and you exclaimed, "Honey, I'm hoooooome!"

7 turned towards you as you entered and smiled. "Hey, (Y/N)! 4 has something to tell you."

4 jumped two inches into the air, face not even bothering to conceal his sudden panic. You looked at him expectantly, feeling your affection towards him rekindling.

You bent your knees to come closer to his level. "What's up?"

"....."

4 fidgeted, at a loss. He couldn't exactly convey his feelings with words — probably not even if he spoke the same language as you. Luckily, you had gotten to understand him over time, and so you had an idea what was going through his head.

"Is it something you can show me instead?"

4 tilted his head thoughtfully. What were his options? He could show you an image of a heart... He could show you a love story... He could hug you...

Flushed beneath his stitches, 4 sped past you with a surge of unanticipated energy and disappeared deep into the library.

Confusion took over your face for a brief moment. You wondered why he ran away — not that it was unusual, but this time it had to do with something he wanted to share, and not your pestering. Could it have been that he liked you...? It wasn't that much of a stretch.

"He's just so adorable, isn't he?" You smiled at 7, feigning a relaxed disposition, though your eyes were honed in on her expression. She smiled hesitantly, as if there was something to hide. Bingo.

"Tell me, is it a crush?" A grin split across your face. 7 laughed awkwardly, shifting slightly in her stance.

“You’ve guessed it,” she admitted, smiling fondly toward the bookshelf 4 had disappeared behind.

You fist bumped the air, grinning upward at the ceiling. You couldn’t say the news really shocked you, but you were excited. You’d suspected it all along but never said anything about it, not wanting to bother him or push him away on accident. You wanted to keep things how they were — if anything, maybe sharing your feelings would make the cutest stitchpunk (in your opinion) feel more open to following you around.

“7! Can you bring him to me?” You gave her a sly smile. “I have to show him something.”

As you’d requested, 4 was soon dragged back towards the entrance. He looked a little embarrassed — twiddling nervously with his hands and refusing to look up from his feet — but much calmer than he had been before. That wouldn’t last long.

You leaped forward before he had the chance to escape, glomping him with all the force you had. He recoiled harshly, but surprisingly managed to stay standing. If they could blush, he would have had a tomato-colored face. His face was pressed into your shoulder, and his arms were up hovering over yours awkwardly, as if unsure whether to hug back or try to pull away.

“Of course I like you back, silly.” You hugged him even tighter. “Who in the world couldn’t love you?”

4 blinked twice, as the realization of your confession began to sink in. At the same time, he felt a strong mixture of emotions — shock, happiness, embarrassment — and instinctively began fighting to flee from your embrace. But he took one look at 7, and knew that fleeing was no longer an option — you knew, and he had to face it straight on.

‘This is a good thing. She likes you.’

Suddenly, he squeezed you back even harder, reciprocating your hug. You smiled fondly as you nuzzled your head into his shoulder.

And this time, he didn’t run away.

5:

You and 5 were currently in 2’s room, stringing up pretty paper hearts and tinsel around the edges of the walls. 2 wasn’t there, nor did he know what you were up to (hopefully) — 7 and 9 were supposed to be keeping him busy.

You had decided to start celebrating “birthdays” in order to keep up the mood. Some of the stitchpunks had begun to grow gloomy as the weather grew colder and weeks passed with few notable happenings. To change that, you started up a calendar, and began marking the

days down to each stitchpunk's birthday. You just hoped 2 wasn't already aware of it, and the surprise was spoiled. You could never really tell if he was too easygoing to make a note of it, or if he paid attention to everything and just pretended he didn't.

5 glanced at you, holding up the extra tinsel like it was a document in a foreign language that he couldn't decipher. "Where should this go?"

"It would look soooo pretty... there! Don't you see~?" You took the strand and wrapped it around the bed frame, tying it in a cute bow.

You stepped back to scrutinize the room from a distance. Satisfied, you nodded, and moved on to the next task at hand — the pictures you'd made. You took the push pins you'd gathered earlier and began strategically placing the pictures in their destined locations.

As you moved, you talked and talked and talked. You talked about how this one was definitely going to top 1's birthday — after all, there was only so much one could do for a stick in the mud like him, and 2 was far more likely to appreciate small gifts of sentimental value, like the colorful stones 9 and 7 had gathered for him from the backyard of an abandoned house miles away. You talked about how much you wish cats were real, because you wanted to ride one. You talked about a magic trick book that the twins had discovered and given to you, on the condition that you learned whatever secrets were inside and put on a show for them. You talked about how that would be their big birthday present.

As you went on and on and on, 5's inner thoughts increased in volume, and your words seemed to fade into the background, unheard beneath the whispers of 'Should I tell her? Since we're alone, this is the best time... But no — I can't. I'm just too scared. What if it goes wrong?'

5 began to suspect that 9 and 7 chose to leave with 2 somewhere for another reason — him. It had become ridiculous how obvious his crush on you was to everyone. 2 had been the first to notice, probably thanks to the amount of time you all spent together. 6 was the second, in a dream. Not that he'd told 5 about his discovery right away — he just smiled a little whenever he saw the two of you together, and a week or so later, he showed 5 a drawing of the two of you together, and explained where the inspiration came from. 6's tendency to find out everything made 5 a little uncomfortable, and he hadn't been back up for a visit since.

7 and 9 were the next to find out. It was only a matter of time; all it took was a few accidental suggestive sentences that weren't thought out, and a few embarrassed stares, and 7 worked out the puzzle herself, telling 9 soon after. 3 and 4 were the next to find out — through 7, of course. Those two had to get their gossip from somewhere!

But what surprised 5 most was that 1 figured it out next.

1 never explained exactly how he knew. It could have been from 6's drawings, or from 7 talking too much, or he could have found it out on his own. 5 merely recalled how 1 had waited some time before calling him in to speak about it. 5 was shocked that 1 actually seemed to be *advising* him, rather than scolding him or warning him against having the feelings he did.

5 remembered how 8 had revealed once, when the two were talking about the magic trick accident you caused (which triggered 1 and his paranoia into trying to put some new policy in place), that he had known all along that you liked him. He told 5 that he should tell you how he felt.

5 barely registered the advice, shocked that even 8 had jumped the bandwagon and tried to convince him to ask you out. 8 only seemed half-interested to begin with, but still, the fact that he brought it up was surprising in itself.

5's heart swelled as he thought about you and how you might like him back. He gazed over at you, as you stood there in the middle of the room — ranting about the importance of festivities, and how to make 3 and 4 return for the party, and how to prevent 1 and 8 from being sourpusses — and couldn't quite believe it, especially since you were so caught up in your rant that you weren't even looking back at him. 5 wondered if everyone was mistaken; he didn't want to be wrong and risk rejection, if he ever worked up the courage to confess to you.

What he didn't know, however, was that you WERE secretly looking at him — only when he wasn't watching, that is. You frowned, noticing that he looked a bit upset and troubled. You asked him what the matter was, but he said nothing.

“... It's okay if you wanna stop. I can take care of the rest of the decorating.”

“No, it's not that,” 5 assured you, his eye refocusing on you. “I like decorating. It's something new and it's for a good cause — and it'll make 2 happy, I'm sure of it.”

You grinned, excited about the same thing. 2 deserved to be happy, and you hoped he would be after today.

But you kept your eye on 5. To your dismay, it only took a few moments, and then he looked upset again, his body hunched over in a shy position, his optic unfocused. This called for more drastic measures.

“5? Tell me what's wrong,” you demanded.

“Nothing's wrong,” he replied, a desperate edge to his voice. You frowned, not believing him for a second. You grabbed him by the shoulders and began to shake him gently.

“5. Teeeeeelll meeeeee. I can't help you if I don't know what's bothering you. Is it 2? Did you get in a fight with someone? Are you hurt? Are you mad at me? Tell me what's going on.”

“N-No, it's none of that-! It's just—“

5's voice trailed off, his head jerking to the side as running footsteps down the hall grew closer and closer. Suddenly, 6 stumbled into view, somehow looking more nervous than usual.

“6? What's the matter?” 5 asked.

“The watchtower,” 6 exclaimed. “Both of you, go!”

You glanced worriedly at 5 before following him as he sprinted away in the direction of the tower. The urgency in 6’s voice told them they couldn’t afford to wait for an explanation. You wondered what could possibly have gone wrong. You only hoped no one was hurt, or worse.

You hadn’t realized just how good 6 was at acting. (A little frightening, actually.) You had no clue it was all just a setup.

You discovered it once you and 5 had arrived at the top, only to find nothing and no one waiting for you. By the time you turned back, 8 — who had let you up through the pulley system — was already gone, leaving the two of you up there alone.

“8! Let us down!” 5 yelled. 8 glanced up once, then grinned and continued making his exit down through the pulley system.

“Heeeeeeey! Come back heeeere!” You shouted, waving your arms frantically. He didn’t even look. “Is this about the room thing?! I’m sorry! I meant to redesign 7’s room, it was a simple mistake! It’s not like pink is that bad of a color! ... And I bet you liked the doll I left for you! It was MADE WITH LOVE!”

“(Y/N).”

“What?”

“He’s gone.”

“... Oh.”

Only slightly bummed out — you were with 5, so you really couldn’t complain — you began to examine the room. Very quickly, you discovered something unusual.

“5? What’s that?”

You were pointing at the center of the watchtower, where a piece of paper was sticking out of the edges of a book. He cautiously approached the book and flipped it open, revealing words written in ink.

‘would you both just confess already’

~ 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9

Both of you inched away from one another uncomfortably once you’d read the paper, embarrassed. You had moved out of surprise, and a dash of nervousness, but overall you were excited by what the paper implied. Especially since everyone, including 1, 8, and the twins signed it — that meant that it was clear enough to everyone that it couldn’t possibly be false.

The thought of being intimate with 5 warmed your heart. You knew he needed a little push to admit his feelings, though.

“Both...?” 5 murmured, at the same time you said, “Oh, so you do like me.”

Unable to hide it, 5 shuffled a little further away, hiding his face by turning his back on you. You just walked around him — you weren’t letting him go that easily!

“That’s good,” you smiled cheerfully, nudging him playfully on the shoulder. He opened his mouth, embarrassed, but you raised a finger to indicate you weren’t done. “Because I like you, too.”

You giggled, watching as a series of emotions — shock, embarrassment, nervousness, hopefulness — played on his face like a movie. You leaned forward and granted him a quick kiss on the cheek, then pulled him close into a hug. Your chin rested on his shoulder, your head tilted to relax against his.

5 almost couldn’t believe it — the sheer luck that the two of you liked each other just as deeply. He had still been uncertain, even after your confession — but the kiss cemented it. You liked him. You really did.

5 hugged you back, chuckling at the turn of events. It wasn’t even time for 2’s party, and he already felt his day had peaked. Nothing could get better than this.

He held you in his arms protectively, internally promising to never take you for granted. ‘Thanks, guys.’

6:

Glancing up, you saw that the sun had passed its peak in the sky. That meant it was the afternoon — time to go spend time with 6.

It had been a few weeks since you last hung out with 7, since she had been on a secret quest for quite some time. She had asked you to join her, but you had refused. You knew your place was at the Sanctuary. If something happened to 6 while you were gone, your sense of justice would never let it go.

As much as you liked 7, frankly, she was not the priority, so you said your goodbyes and hurried up the stairs into the cathedral.

You wondered what drawings 6 might have made today. Only a week or two had passed since you convinced 6 to start putting up his own drawings on his wall, and now there were only a couple pictures of the source left up there. Your tactic seemed to be working — 6 was in far better spirits than he had been before. You knew this because you spent most of your day with him — not the mornings, usually, but the entirety of your evenings were spent in his company. Sometimes you wouldn’t even see the other stitchpunks for days, because you

didn't usually go out searching for them. You enjoyed the peace of being alone with your friend, far more than the chaotic wildness of the others.

You didn't just draw when you were together. You would talk about the good things 6 saw in his visions — well, you would talk about both the good and the bad. You knew 6 was keeping much of the bad from you, but that could only be expected. At least he was opening up to you, little by little. It was disheartening enough to think about the past, when humans and animals and plants were alive, and the land was beautiful and green and blue, and happiness came at little cost. But there was also hope for the future — everything was a cycle, and one day, thousands or millions of years away, maybe it would all come back again.

Something else you'd done lately was sing him to sleep. You would stay up into the night with him, make sure he returned to his bed for the night, and sing slow, peaceful tunes until he fell asleep. You would keep singing various songs, quietly, for another hour or so, making sure that he was all right before you went to sleep yourself. On the days you sang longest, he tended to wake feeling more rested and less bothered. He still suffered from terrible nightmares on a weekly basis, but you'd decided to sleep on his floor, where his disturbed cries would wake you. You woke him from his nightmares, and talked with him until he was ready to try for sleep again.

You became an escort of sorts, leading 6 around the library whenever he wanted to learn more, or get some creative ideas for his art. You went to the twins to ask some specific questions about his visions — whether they knew the historical things he had seen, where he could learn more about them. 3 and 4 were happy to show him around the archives, while you and 7 trained or discussed tactics.

The others seemed surprised by how much more active 6 had become since your arrival. He roamed through the Sanctuary's halls with a bright smile on his face, greeting everyone who came his way openly, showing very little anxiety over his actions. He visited 9 and the others often in the mornings, though he still avoided 8 or 1 whenever they ran into each other.

You believed that 6 was just extremely misunderstood. Beneath the crazy stitchpunk that everyone knew from the Machine era was just a regular shy guy with an excitable curiosity and a great talent. He was adorable, and innocent, and he carried far too much pain for anyone to bear. No one else was as alienated as he was. No one else had terrible nightmares and insomnia, causing them to rarely feel at ease. No one else feared being bullied every single day when his best friend wasn't at his side. And no one else dealt with all of this with a smile on his face, thinking only the good of people, and never blaming them for disappointing him.

Not only was he more admirable than all the others, but he was also the most pure-hearted. It was clear to see how 1 and 8 weren't pure-hearted, and 7 and 9 had too much rebellion and stubbornness within them. Even 2, 3, 4, and 5 could be pushed too far and show their mean streak, or would put themselves first, but 6 was always willing to do anything for anyone who asked, regardless of whether or not he had plans. You pictured him running about the halls excited as a little kid, and it warmed your heart. All you really wanted was for him to be happy.

Before you met 6, your life felt so hollow. You were made to defend people — your purpose required you to be with someone who needed you. Out in the Emptiness, it was barren — the only thing that moved was tattered cloth blowing in the wind, or the dirt you kicked up as you trudged through it. There was no reason to live without someone to spend your time with.

6 was special in his own right. The stitchpunks as a whole were lost without him. He brought more to the group than they thought he had to offer. You didn't mind waking up in the middle of the night to his strangled cries, soothing him back to sleep however many times he needed. His gentle presence helped you just as much as it helped him. He reminded you why life was worthy of their suffering. He gave you hope.

You walked into the throne room and caught sight of 8 sitting at the doorway, his scissors blade resting across his lap. He took one glance at you and continued sharpening his blade, not even bothering to threaten or stop you. You weren't sure how to feel.

Typically, 6 kept his status as a diamond in the rough — hidden from everyone, unnoticed and unbothered in his corner of the room. But once, you'd entered and seen that 8 snuck in. He had come to pester 6, and was teasing him about a particular drawing that he held high above his head. Despite knowing he was too short to reach it, 6 was jumping up with a desperate look on his face, hands strained to reach the piece of paper. He looked like he was about to cry.

Infuriated, you lashed out at 8 with your throwing blades — you threw two, and then jumped at him and sliced with the third, until he backed off, bewildered. You'd cut a few tears in him, the most alarming being the one that cut across his left arm and halfway across his stomach. The adrenaline left you on edge, and you took a crouched stance in front of 6, ready to leap at 8 again if need be.

"You leave 6 the hell alone," you growled, twirling your push pin menacingly. "Or you'll get hit with worse than that."

"(Y/N)! He's hurt!" 6 cried. You relaxed for a moment, and took a closer look at 8. Guilt suddenly swept you away as you saw the terrified look on 8's face. His hands were pressed firmly against the tear on his stomach, preventing anything from falling out. The drawing had slipped out of his hands before the first slice even landed, and had drifted onto the floor, face down. 8 spun around and sprinted out of the room, probably to get himself fixed, and to save face.

You had felt bad for hurting him that bad — it went against your moral code, and looking back on it, violence wasn't even necessary. But you'd felt the need to protect 6. 6 was more important.

You remembered hearing the others' frightened cries as they saw 8, thinking a beast had attacked. But when they heard it was just you, they started staring at you warily whenever they saw you. You knew what those looks meant — they thought you were a monster. But you stood your ground, because if that was what it took to protect 6, you would do it.

Still, you remembered 6 stepping up to you, that nervous look back in his eyes, murmuring, “It’s no one’s fault.” He hadn’t even blamed 8 for messing with him — he never blamed anyone. He was too pure.

Shrugging off the bad memory, you walked into 6’s room. “6, I’m here,” you announced.

“(Y/N)!” He called out your name in that excited, jittery tone of his, and your stress seemed to vanish. You smiled as he ran up to you, a drawing in his hands.

“I drew a picture of us! Look!” He held it out for you to take.

Slightly embarrassed, you complied, and held the picture in your hands. It was a nice drawing, very clearly depicting the two of you standing very close together, leaning on one another and smiling. A large heart was drawn in the center, connecting your two bodies.

Silently, you stared at the drawing, wondering if he meant to imply that he liked you... more than a friend. You hadn’t thought too much of it before, but the thought made you feel tingly inside — in a strangely good way. Your embarrassment grew, as you realized that, if it was true, you would feel the same way.

6 frowned. “Do you not like it?”

“Oh — of course I do. Sorry I didn’t say it sooner.” You paused. “Do you... mean it... you know... that way...?”

You weren’t sure if he would understand the question as you phrased it, but without hesitation, he replied, “I do. ... Is that a problem?”

You smiled, feeling a thumping in your chest. You wondered if stitchpunks really didn’t have hearts, because you were feeling far more human than ever before.

“No, it’s not. I... really like it.”

6 smiled brightly, tackling you in a hug. He was glad that the vision he’d had of the two of you becoming a couple was right. Maybe visions weren’t so bad, if they could give him the confidence to grow closer and closer to the one he loved most.

Maybe he could start to trust in his good dreams just as much as the bad ones. Without you, he never would have realized it. Suddenly the world was ten times brighter, and 6 had never felt so hopeful in all of his existence.

8:

A creamy-tinted orange light centered around the dropping sun was about to transform the day into night. You sat together on the roof, clutching the edges carefully so as not to endanger yourselves. It had been your request to view the sunset from such a high location,

and though 8 was skeptical and tried to urge against it, he had no choice when he saw the sadness sweep across your gentle face. And so you sat there side by side on the roof, observing the end of the day, and all the light as it scattered across the sky before being enveloped in darkness.

If he was being honest with himself, 8 didn't really care for the sunset. It just wasn't something he found interesting. But that didn't mean he would have changed his decision to go with you.

"8," you whispered. "Look how pretty the light is. Isn't it romantic?"

8 gazed down at you with scrutinizing eyes. You were clearly invested in the sight, your eyes focused intently on the scenery. There was something about you then that made him feel... at peace. Almost like with his magnet, just pure contentment.

He hadn't let himself think much about what 7 made him realize — his soft spot for you. But every time he encountered you, whether it be in the halls or on the steps, the thoughts worked their way into his thick skull. 'Is this feeling of always wanting (Y/N) nearby — love? We don't even like the same things.' But then 8 found himself wondering, how did he even know that? All he really knew to be fun was the job that 1 gave him (sometimes), the enjoyment he got out of the magnet, and being with you.

'Why do I like her? She's like 6. It was always fun to mess with him.'

But it wasn't fun anymore. And was it really even "fun" in the first place? Not really — it was more of a last-ditch pastime, because 6 was the least boring and annoying out of everyone, and taking away or ruining his drawings was the only way to get his attention.

'This is stupid. I shouldn't care this much. I should be by myself.'

But then you flashed him your sweet, innocent smile, and he knew he had to tag along with whatever would make you happy, or the guilt of disappointing you would eat him alive.

8 tried to ignore the looks. For a long time, he got by fine, but he started to get frustrated with the weird looks the others would send him when he was walking with you. It was none of their business — why were they making such a big deal out of it? When they started getting involved, like 7 did, then it led to this whole inner turmoil and all these feelings he was not well equipped to handle. He was the guardian, the fighter — not the emotions expert.

8 had sought out their leader, 1, once for advice. It hadn't gone well.

"So, uh, boss?"

"Yes, yes, 8, get on with it. Report."

"Uhhhh... So... I think I like (Y/N)."

"And?" 1 rolled his eyes. 8 paused, waiting for the true meaning of his words to hit, and they sure hit 1 like a ton of bricks.

The reaction wasn't anything he'd hoped for. 1 looked absolutely mortified, and all he gave as advice was, "Dear Creator... Fine. Go on. Just don't let it distract you."

1 hadn't said anything else on the matter before sending him off, clearly needing some time to let the information sink in. 8 knew 1 was counting on him to protect their group — their family. It was his duty to never be distracted, or it would be his fault someone got hurt, or worse. Still, 8 was beginning to get fed up with all the orders. He started questioning why it even mattered, why he should follow 1's or The Scientist's commands in the first place. The beasts didn't even exist anymore, so there was no point to all the rules and precautions. It was just getting in the way of living how he wanted to live. With you.

At one point, not too many days later, 1 called in 8 to his throne to scold him for his worsening performance and attitude. All 8 could think about was, 'Why? Why do I deal with this?' He let 1 yell, though, because that was just what he did — but when he brought up how you were the cause of all this and needed to be taught a lesson, that was the last straw. Rage engulfed 8 as he stomped toward 1 menacingly, causing the leader's optics to enlarge and his hands to firmly grasp his staff. 8 grabbed his magnet back from beside 1's seat, then glowered down upon the older stitchpunk. Some form of threat came out of his mouth — later on, he couldn't remember exactly what he'd said, his mind was overflowing with rage — but it was clearly bad enough that 1 was too frightened to speak to him for weeks, and 6, who had secretly witnessed the whole event, blabbered on about it to 9 and 7 later.

Neither of the two could believe it — after all this time, 8 was standing up to 1 now? It didn't make sense. But then 7 remembered watching you and 8 walking down the hall together — you skipping around playfully and linking arms with him when no one was looking; you looking up at him with the smile of a girl deeply in love; him looking down at you with the eyes of a protective guardian — and all her doubt was swept away.

Sitting with you on the roof, his eyes softened as they rested on you. Enthralled by a natural phenomenon that happened daily, upbeat about every thing that came your way — it was stupid, and very childish, but it was just so lovable.

8 was giving up a lot to spend time with you.

For example, his duty — although he didn't believe that it was so important anymore; 7 ventured into the Emptiness every day, and never came across anything remotely dangerous.

His relationship with 1 — now, that stung. He'd always prided himself on being the only stitchpunk his leader could trust, the one with power. He was confided in, told things 1 rarely told anyone else. It made him feel special. But if it came between 1 and you, it was an easy choice to make.

His reputation — that was the hardest one to deal with, by far. No one feared him as much as they used to. (Except 1, but he didn't feel good about that.) 6 still seemed disturbed whenever he approached, but he wasn't fearful. There was a difference. And whenever he walked past 2, 5, 7, or 9, and you were around or mentioned in a conversation, they would smirk at him knowingly, rather than quickly walk away. The one thing he used to enjoy most — power — reduced to the ashes, because of you.

But, looking at your happy face, 8 decided that it was worth it. Who needed their opinions when he had you? They weren't worth half as much, even put together.

And the way you looked at him, too — he was beginning to notice the light behind your optics. It was like a light switch — when you were alone, they were dark; when you were with others, they were light; but when you were with him, they were even brighter, so bright that, when you were around others, they seemed dim in comparison. You looked at him in a way you didn't look at anyone else, with a smile reserved just for 8. It made him feel special — so much more special than being trusted by 1.

As you gazed into the setting sun, you thought about the presence by your side, how comforting it was. You really liked 8. At the beginning of your friendship, you liked him so much simply because he made you feel safe. None of the others seemed half as reliable. Even though you loved them all, there was something different about 8. He was alone most of the time, but that meant he was more willing to be with you, so that neither of you had to be alone. 8 didn't try to force a conversation when you didn't want it. But he also wasn't completely boring. He was willing to go along with almost whatever you wanted, and you loved him for that. But you also loved spending relaxing evenings with him, giving him massages and making him feel appreciated, because you knew he didn't get enough of that. And you enjoyed the little bit of talking that you did. The others seemed to forget that 8 was one of them — he wasn't just a mindless fighter, and he wasn't a slave to do 1's bidding. It was interesting to speak with him, to see what his opinions were on various topics, because the others — as smart as they may be — would never have guessed he had them.

But most of all, you liked 8 because 8 was there for you, and he was someone who you felt needed you, too. All of the others had a support system — even 1 went to 2 sometimes for his troubles instead of 8 — and had their own goals or hobbies that kept them too busy to give you the attention you needed. And sometimes they would treat you like a needy child — especially 2. But being with 8 made you feel safe, valued, and equal. You wouldn't change a thing about it.

'... Well,' you thought, 'I wouldn't mind getting even closer. ... But, that's okay. Neither of us need that. I could go on forever just the way we are now, and always be content.'

Meanwhile, 8 was thinking the same thing. 'Yeah, I guess maybe this is the start of something. But I'm just gonna leave it alone. (Y/N) looks to peaceful right now to bother her. She doesn't ever need to know, really. I can keep it in, and we can keep doing this, for as long as we want to.'

It was an unspoken agreement that neither of you thought it was worth risking your friendship to change things up. There was no point in fixing something that wasn't broken, after all.

The last quarter of the sun was beginning to sink over the horizon. A comfortable silence continued between the two of you, as you waited for the last remnants of light to be swallowed up in the night.

A sudden shout disrupted your peace.

“WILL YOU TWO JUST CONFESS ALREADY?! THE WAIT IS KILLING ME HERE.”

You spun around, but 8 had beaten you to it and was sending a death glare toward 7, whose head vanished back into the cathedral. If you could blush, you would have. Still, you sighed — the moment felt ruined, now that 7 had to bring up something that would make the two of you much more uncomfortable.

8 mumbled angrily under his breath, something that you couldn't hear. You thought you could make out the words 'spear-flinging', 'business', and 'knock her flat'.

“It's fine,” you assured him, smiling. He looked into your eyes and paused, and then the anger in his face slowly cooled off.

“You sure?” He looked toward the Sanctuary, hesitant. “She'll just keep on saying things if we don't teach her not to.”

“No violence.” You stuck out your tongue, and he let his tense shoulders rest. You glanced at him, his back turned, and a small smile slipped through.

“... It's not entirely false, anyway.”

His body seemed to freeze, before turning suddenly to face you. Shock and anxiety covered his face — shock that you liked him, anxiety over the prospect of your increasing closeness. But beneath the surface, he felt... happy. He hadn't completely registered what this meant for the two of you until now, hadn't realized that mutual love was a possibility for someone like him. He had rarely ever been scared before, but he sure was now.

His silence spoke volumes to you, but you misunderstood its language. “I'm sorry,” you apologized shyly. It was all you could say.

“It's fine,” he quickly replied. You nodded, staring off into space. It caught you off guard when he suddenly grabbed your hand. “It's not entirely false for me, either.”

Optimistic, you risked a straight-on gaze, and were pleasantly surprised to see the same swirl of emotions on his face as you held in your heart. You grinned, squeezing his hand gently, embracing the beginning of an unlikely romance.

9:

“Today's the day. Today I'll finally tell him,” You murmured to yourself, tracing the edges of the gift with your finger. Your thoughts were occupied with the fantasy playing through your head, of what was bound to happen when you told him. You weren't sure he would reciprocate your feelings, but it would still get a load off of your shoulders. ... At least, that's what you believed, whether or not it was true. You didn't let yourself think too hard about it, not wanting to scare yourself into keeping it a secret for much longer.

“Today. I’m going to do it today. And nothing’s going to stop me.”

You smiled away the pit of nervousness within you. Psyching yourself up, you repeated the statement over and over, engraining it into your mind. You hurried over to an empty space of the room and began to stretch. The tension and pulling gave you something else to focus on. After almost 10 minutes of stretching, you began to do a set of 50 jumping jacks, 10 push ups, 20 sit ups, 30 star jumps, and 40 rows. You were thankful that it didn’t make you a sweaty mess, the way humans had to suffer. It was just something to keep your mind off of your anxiousness. It also simultaneously boosted your confidence, which was a big plus. You would definitely need it.

It was a familiar process, but one that you told yourself wouldn’t last much longer. Getting excited, planning it all out, preparing the perfect moment — and then your nervousness would force you to stop.

No. Not today. You would definitely tell him. You wouldn’t question yourself like you did the past few times — you’d had so many opportunities together out scavenging, or during your quiet visits to the library, or during the few holiday celebrations the twins and 2 kept learning about and wanting to implement. But each time, you felt a lump form in your throat, blocking out the confession you wanted to badly to burst out.

Your nervousness was in check this time. Today was different from previous days. You weren’t going to work up the courage in secret and then deflate like a popped balloon the instant he entered the room. No bailing out of this one. You couldn’t afford to — if you pushed it off any longer, someone else would tell him, and you wanted it to be on your own terms.

It really wasn’t a secret, you’d discovered — to your horror. Apparently, many of the others had known about it, and for a while, too. They acted like it was common sense, which was extra annoying.

You hung out with 8 once when he was off duty, relaxing on a tipped-over statue in the front of the cemetery. You had just made your gift for 9, and you were pacing back and forth on the ground, ranting about how bad an idea this was, and all the consequences that could come out of it. 8 had just rolled his eyes at you.

“You worry too much,” he stated, jumping down off the statue, the momentum blowing some ash inches further away. “You know he likes you, and if he liked you less for giving him something, then he’d be crazy. ... Still think you should’ve given him a magnet, though.”

“No!” You cried, flushed. “It has to be more thoughtful than that! 9 isn’t the kind of guy to... take part in that sort of thing! ... And if he was, it’d be yours I’d be taking!”

8 raised the equivalent of an eyebrow. “I’d like to see you try.”

You were never one to say no to a challenge, so you immediately lashed out at him, beginning a sparring match that would cause 5 to panic when he spotted it from the watchtower. You forgot your worries, and time moved on.

2 and 7 were also avid supporters of the 9x(Y/N) ship, and they seemed to get a kick out of teasing you about it. Every time 9 left the room, she would look at you with the most smug face, and you'd end up yelling out of embarrassment. It only seemed to solidify her stance — that you were deeply in love and needed to make it official.

“Come on, (Y/N) — it's not the end of the world if he says no,” 2 claimed. The glare 7 gave him forced him to continue. “And I can bet you with 100% certainty that he won't. What's there to lose?”

“My longest-lasting friendship,” You deadpanned.

“(Y/N). You have to take a chance,” 7 pressed. “If you don't, you'll always feel unfulfilled. Trust me, he likes you. Tell him, and save us all the dramatic tension.”

You started to wonder, if it was so obvious that you were head-over-heels for 9, then why didn't he know it yet? Was he pretending, like you were, for the sake of protecting your friendship?

That was your excuse you gave to them — you didn't want to ruin your friendship. They looked at you wearily, as if to say, ‘Come on, you're being ridiculous.’ But you were stubborn, and you didn't give in.

Despite what they said, you didn't really think you were all that close to 9. Sure, you were friends, but it wasn't as if you hung out all the time. You cherished your bond and were afraid to be too clingy — plus, you had other things to do, like helping others, creating things, and spending time with your other friends. Plus, many of the times you hung out, 2 or 7 were involved. You weren't usually alone.

Still, those times when you were together felt so nice. Sometimes it felt like it was just the two of you, and no one else mattered.

Thinking about 9, you hugged the gift to your chest, smiling. Today would be different from all the previous days. And that's because of this gift you made for him. You wrapped it carefully, shielding it from outside eyes. You didn't want it to be seen until you were positively ready — what was inside was very thoughtfully made, only for 9 to see and hold.

You felt the anxiety bubble inside you again, and began to fret over whether he would like it. Your courage began to fail you, as you began to lower to gift back down — but then you narrowed your eyes, and threw yourself into another intensive workout routine. As you did your one hundred jumping jacks, you thought of 9's smile, and you thought, ‘I won't fail again.’

By the time you were done, you were exhausted. So exhausted, in fact, that you ended up falling asleep on the floor, curled up in a ball, your gift only an inch or two from your hands.

Much later, you awoke with the sudden realization that you were supposed to go out scavenging with 9. You nearly hyperventilated, worrying that you missed the time, that 9 was upset with you, that he left and now every chance of him being with you is shatter—

KNOCK. KNOCK.

Your self-loathing was intense, but it was nowhere near as intense as your love for 9. You were up in an instant, answering the door.

9 was standing there, as you'd anticipated, looking a little worried. Inwardly, he was relieved, glad you were okay. He'd begun to think something bad had happened, since you were usually always ready and waiting for him far before the set time for these missions.

He said as much to you, and the guilt felt like it was eating you alive.

"I'm sorry, I really am, I didn't forget, I just came back to rest up for the day, but I didn't mean to fall asleep! I'm so sorry!"

"It's okay," 9 replied, laughing at your rapidly fired apologies. But there was a part of him that he refused to show, a part that felt disappointed that you didn't see him as important enough to stay up for. But he pushed the feeling aside — he didn't blame you. He could never bring himself to blame you, especially for something so insignificant.

It was just that, when it came to you, even the small things seemed big. The smallest smile would give him butterflies, the smallest gesture would make him smile. A few minutes with you could brighten his day as much as an hour with 5 or 7. He wanted more time with you, to be in the center of your universe. He noticed when you were gone before anyone else did, and his mood could never be quite the same when you weren't there. It was embarrassing, really, how much he liked you and cherished your time together.

He'd spent so much time working up the courage to tell you his feelings, but he would always end up bailing on it. He didn't want to ruin what you had by changing the way you treated him. It wasn't likely that you would share his feelings, anyway. 7 vehemently disagreed with him, but he wasn't willing to stake your relationship — the thing most important to him in his life — on her beliefs.

9 forced a smile as he pushed away his oncoming mental fantasy about how the two of you would look as a couple into the depths of his mind. "Are you still willing and ready to go?"

"Of course!" You exclaimed. "I would always go with you!"

Had 9 been human, he would have blushed from the enthusiasm and utter sincerity in your tone. You paused, slowly registering the implications of what you said. An awkward silence followed, both of you stuck in your self-loathing thoughts.

'Great, now I messed it up!' You thought, as 9 thought to himself, 'Stop getting your hopes up. That's not what she meant.'

Suddenly you brightened up, realizing what you had left in your room. "Wait one second!" You yelled, your voice full of excitement. You turned and disappeared into your room, but not before 9 caught the look of joy on your face.

He smiled. That was one of the things he loved best about you — your spirit. As long as you were happy, he didn't mind waiting in the hallway a little longer. He wondered what you could possibly be getting.

A few moments later, you came back out with the small wrapped present in your arms, and a nervous look on your face. You stood just outside the doorway as he stared down at it, and choked out a “Ta-da!” before your usual panic could take over.

9 stared at it for a few seconds, as if it were some foreign substance. You almost wondered if he knew what a present was — or maybe his pause was because he knew the gesture, and he didn't the present? Maybe he didn't like you, and he didn't want you to assume he did? Maybe you needed to just go back in your room and pretend it never happened — maybe that would—

“Is it for me?” 9 asked, his eyes wide with surprise. Flustered, you practically threw it into his arms, yelling, “Of course it's for you!” Your arms now free, you clasped them together behind your back, nervously tipping back and forth as you waited for a response.

9 smiled, his voice nervous. “Th-Thank you, (Y/N)... That's really kind of you. I don't know what to say.”

You felt your heart swell, and you looked at your feet shyly, before quietly responding, “Well, you mean a lot to me... And I wanted to show you that.”

Your eyes were trained on your feet, but you didn't see any movement from him in your peripheral view, and he didn't say anything for a few moments. Your anxiety kicked in, telling you, ‘this was a mistake, this was a mistake, THIS WAS A MISTAKE’, and you cleared your throat, about to raise your voice and (falsely) claim that you didn't mean anything romantic by it. But then you glanced up and saw his shy smile, and he took the chance to speak up.

“(Y/N)... I really like you, too.”

Your eyes widened, and you stared at him, wondering if it was true, if he really meant it. He was looking at you, too, his smile a little wider now, as you both came to the sudden realization that, yes, this was true — and that you both might feel as strongly towards one another as you'd always hoped.

Chapter End Notes

[This is super long, and I apologize if you don't like that. The future parts for this will likely be half as long as this or even less, because this is just setting up the relationship. Everything else should be short and sweet. ... I think. It's hard to tell before it's written. After all, I planned for this chapter to be half as long as it turned out to be, even when I did a detailed outline for it.

I'd like your input on what you want the next part(s) to be. I have a list of other cute little scenarios, like Your First Argument, Your Favorite Thing To Do Together, When Someone Else Crushes On You, etc. Plus, there are holiday specials to do! Let me know what you want to see.

Also, I want to know how you feel about the characters. I originally considered having the reader's gender unclear and doing every character (including 7), but it was just easier for characterization if I made them all girls. Does it feel wrong to any of you that I kept 7 out of this? If it bothers you enough, I'm willing to go back and add a love interest for her in my quiz and in the previous chapters of this story. But even if you'd like that, I also need to know whether you want the reader to be a girl or a boy. The story was designed for the reader to be a girl, so my gut instinct is to make her a girl, but I'm not sure if there are any guys reading who would appreciate their representation instead. Let me know what you think — if not enough people think it's a crime to leave 7 out, then I'll just keep going with the story as it is, because 8 characters is a large enough number to work with, and I think I have it well balanced as is.

So... yeah. Please comment with any ideas or requests you have, or any concerns, critiques, or corrections I need to make. Everything helps!

Lastly, tell me your favorite character interpretation in this story (1-9) so far! Tell me your least favorite! Explain for bonus points~]

V {What He Loves Most About You}

Chapter Notes

“Maybe you could do a Scenario on what the stitchpunks find as their favorite part about you personality wise. I think it would be really heartwarming if that was explored in a chapter.”

[Thanks to Greenkitten 101 on Quotev for the suggestion! I actually wasn't going to do this one until after the next two or three scenarios, because I thought I should go in the set order I had planned, but I didn't want to hold off my first request for several months, and I think it actually fit kinda well! I hope you enjoyed this, and if not, or if there were any mistakes or critiques, feel free to let me know. :) I'm very open to feedback, even if it's negative.

Leave me your thoughts in the comments, or send me a message! Thanks!]

1:

You were consistently calm and rational.

It was the day following a nightmare, and his stress levels were through the roof. He'd cursed out 2 for merely greeting him in the morning — an act that had the poor stitchpunk's face sink in hurt while 7 scowled in his direction. The other stitchpunks unanimously agreed to avoid him after that — all except you, who noted his ill temper when he stomped past you in the hall. You'd been sitting criss-crossed on the floor while reading passages from The Bible, but when he stormed past, his velvety red cape flowing elegantly behind his raggedy body, you wordlessly straightened up and followed him through the building.

You took care to make your presence known, stomping on stray sheets of paper and tapping the walls as you followed. His head swung back, squinty little eyes catching sight of you before rolling in annoyance. You took this as an invitation to come closer, and matched his pace beside him.

“What was your nightmare about?” You asked casually, ignoring the temporary shock stilling his movements.

“I didn't have a nightmare,” 1 replied stubbornly. However, that was a lie — it had been a night of the past once more, haunted by the clanking and screeching of metal against metal as the nine other rag dolls were chased by the machines. 1 was all alone, watching in horror as 7 convinced the group to head into the Emptiness, where the metallic sounds resonated. He

pleaded with her to stay, but then they were all gone, mere shadows in the smoke that permeated throughout the air. He heard their screams — 2's and 5's and 9's yells of fear and pain, and then 7's shriek of agony, 6's wild shouting, 8's heavy panting as he fought erratically, and the silence that followed 1's cries for 3, 4, and you.

1 risked a glance up at you. A small smile smoothed the creases across your face, and you placed a hand over his own, brown metal fingers enclosing his gray.

"We're all going to be fine," you promised, your tone like a soothing wind. "You don't need to worry so much. The machines are gone."

"What if they are not? What if they are, and something else is out there now?"

"Then we'll deal with it as it comes. Like we have before. You can worry about it then, but right now, stressing about it is only hurting you and the others."

1 growled. "You do not understand..."

"Then help me understand."

"I am responsible for—"

"You are not."

He eyed you with skeptic confusion, so you elaborated. "We all make choices. Some of them, you can't stop, you can't safeguard. If something ever goes wrong, we will share the blame and find the solution together. As a family."

Family. He couldn't remember the last time he considered this group his family. Back when it was just 2 and the twins? Before 7 came and split them apart? Before 9's actions that led to the end of the machine?

"1?" You held out your hand. "Let's keep walking."

He hadn't even realized he'd stopped. 1 let out a tired sigh, mumbling, "Fine. You win for now."

You smiled, grasping his hand and squeezing it. He gazed down at you, a foreign softness tainting his harsh features.

You were consistently calm and rational. You never were overly emotional, never frightened, never unstable — you grounded him, reduced his paranoia, and soothed his fears with rational arguments. You made him feel like his mistakes were redeemable, like the existence of the stitchpunks, of him, was actually meaningful.

He loved you for it. He'd never admit it, but he loved and he needed you.

What a mess he'd gotten himself in.

2:

You were a queen of quiet, unrecognized kindness.

When an issue arose in their tiny community, you were never looked to for your opinion or insulted for picking the wrong one. That left you on the sidelines, innocent from judgement, invisible to the argumentative, blinded others. You would slip into the shadows, sneak your way out of the scene, and start to do things to ease everyone's frustrations following the harsh confrontations.

For example, you would clean the halls so 1 couldn't grumble over the filthiness and irresponsibility of all the younger stitchpunks; you would leave a kind note on 2's desk, or an intriguing idea you hadn't brought up to him in person yet; you'd go get 6 some ink, or just go searching the barren wasteland for something, anything, that might spark a new hope.

You never told anyone it was you. You never took the credit, nor did anyone seem to notice or care who it was who strung the vibrant chains of colored paper across the ceiling, or who found them an extra cloth to keep them warm at night.

You did all this, all in the shadows, all without anyone else caring to appreciate your actions. All except 2. He saw, and he appreciated.

That was the beginning of his attraction to you. Sure, he loved the smooth texture and soft hue of your fabric, and he'd get pleasant shivers from the cold touch of your fingers, but 2 had never been one to look at the outside first. 7, for instance, had smooth white fabric and a soft round face, the image of a harmless, gentle angel — which, truthfully, she was not.

And although 2 had great admiration for your skills — your bravery, your stealth, your success rate at any given task involving the Emptiness — none of these were quite the thing he admired most.

What he loved most about you, about your personality, was this kindness — this devotion to a group you had yet to integrate yourself into. 2 couldn't wait for the day you started speaking up, making your presence known — he couldn't wait for the others to show they cared about you as much as he did.

The next time the group fell into a deep and heated argument between 7 and 1, he witnessed you slip away down the hall, heading toward 1's quarters. 2 followed shortly after, giving 5 a small smile and a gesture that said, 'Stay here.'

He found you in 1's room, polishing the wood and straightening up his area. You folded the leader's cape over the side of the bed once the wood was polished, and spun around, hearing the slight creak of wood made by 2's step on the floor. Your eyes were large with paranoia, but they quickly softened when they saw it was just 2. You smiled meekly, caught in the act, and gently wrapped an arm around his, leaning into him with the hesitance and innocence of a first romance.

You were a queen of quiet, unrecognized kindness, and he couldn't help but admire you for your gentle strength, that let you go on in a world undeserving of your inner beauty.

He saw in you something that he'd never seen before in any of the others. He couldn't help it if his heart skipped a beat every time he saw you, if it warmed up a few degrees every time he caught you being the kindest soul on the planet. You were too good for him — for this world, even — and he loved you for showing him that every single day.

3:

You were incredibly and fiercely loyal.

It was your most notable trait, sure, and this fact was something that 7 didn't understand — she was loyal and fierce too, so why was that the reason he loved you so much more? But there was a difference between being loyal and fierce, and fiercely loyal. 3 knew he could count on you for anything, all the time, 24/7/365. 7 would sometimes leave, doing her own thing, but you would always stay. ... Unless you were asked to leave, that is.

And it wasn't like you were just some soldier to boss around, either. It wasn't because you were following orders, it was because you WANTED to be there. With him. He knew it, and every time he thought about it, he felt his core temperature increase, and his soul began to skip around inside of him.

Your loyalty made you dependable. 3 would never have to fret when it came to you — he could relax, for once, and that was something that made a world of difference. All he had ever known was gas, death, claws, metal, screeching, fear — he had never been able to sit back and enjoy life. It was only natural that he grew to admire the one who gave him such courage.

Your loyalty made you inspiring. He liked to just sit and admire you most days. Your existence was a spectacle to behold. It wasn't like 7, who might get clouded by her ideals rather than stick to her people, or 8, whose only purpose was to defend and who spent his break time terrorizing the others. You were chivalrous; you spent every moment of your life a trusted ally, never taking a break from being the kind soul that you were, whether it was toward those you were loyal to, or anyone else.

One night, 3 woke up from a nightmare. He had been lying on a bookshelf, in a small but cozy nook between a book and the edge of the shelf. He had dreamt of your death by the machine — he had been endangered and you came to his rescue, unflinching as the machine turned its attention toward you. He tried to scream, but no sound came out. It was always these horrors that made him long for the ability to speak. The moment he awoke was the moment the machine tore you in two.

He had to see you. There was no way he could rest easy after a dream like that, especially not if he couldn't find you.

He slipped out of the crack and began his careful descent down the bookshelf. His twin was sleeping on the shelf below, so he took extra care as he climbed down. Thankfully, 7 was not sleeping there tonight — she was with 9 in the Sanctuary — so he did not have to worry about running into her and being questioned.

As soon as 3's feet touched the cool floor, he scurried towards the entrance. He felt his soul thumping in his chest, his mind alert with stress as he thought of losing you, the pain of losing someone so close. As he reached the entrance and peeked out into the darkness with squinty, focused eyes, he began to worry that maybe if you hadn't been killed, you'd left him, forgotten about them, accepted them as dead and moved on, like all the others had except 7.

But you were there. Nodding off as you leaned back against the edge of the building, you looked so calm and peaceful. 3 relaxed, a smile filling his face. The image of you resting there made him want to curl up next to you and take a nap.

So that was what he did. He took a loud step, alerting you before he got any further. Your body tensed and your eyes shot open, narrowing as you turned to spot the culprit. When you saw it was just 3, you relaxed, and he took that opportunity to kneel to your right and squeeze himself up against you. You smiled at his cute actions and leaned slightly towards him, letting him get as close as he wanted.

You were incredibly and fiercely loyal. Even in sleepiness, he knew he could always count on you to be there for him. Your devotion was very attractive to him, and as he cuddled with you that night, he decided that perhaps it was his turn to show you his own.

4:

You were always so curious and intelligent.

Often, the others ignored this part of you, and it was such a shame, because it was the part he loved most about you. Yes, he loved your enthusiasm in general — it was very cute, even if it sometimes was too much, as he was an introvert and needed some space once in a while.

The others saw only one side of you — the flirty, playful, mischievous side, that is. They never saw the girl that lay beneath — the shiny-eyed, vivacious reader whose mind was filled with intriguing knowledge no one would ever expect.

His favorite moments with you often involved reading together. It was one of those rare moments when there was peace and quiet. He would watch as you mouthed the words to whatever you were reading, and would forget what his book was all about. Every once in a while, a smile would creep across your face, and he'd wonder what it was that was so funny. Then you'd look up and catch him staring at you, and he would swing his head in the other direction to keep you from seeing the obvious "GUILTY" painted on his face.

He loved listening to you explain things, too. Sometimes, when it was just the two of you, he would sit back against the spine of a hardcover book and listen as you educated him on something you'd read before, whether it was an old war or alchemy or plants or animals — it seemed you'd read far more than him, and you hadn't even been around as long. It was a gift you had. Sometimes he felt a twinge of jealousy, wishing he was as knowledgeable as you were. But then he'd realize that, no, he didn't really want that at all. Because then he wouldn't be able to listen to your soothingly learned voice as you told a descriptive tale with great energy, or explained a detailed process with a precise, matter-of-fact tone.

He distinctly remembered walking through the Sanctuary with 4 and 7 — the twins huddled close together like children afraid to be separated — and watching as you frolicked in the distance after being gifted a book on Egyptian runes. 1 had chosen that moment to stroll down the hallway, his back hunched forward slightly with his weight on his staff, and scoffed at the sight. 4 could remember the words uttered as clear as day: “What a simpleton that girl is.”

It had struck him silent at the time, but now a bitterness tinged the corners of his memory. 1 would never have seen that part of you that made you so striking. He would only have ever seen the girl prancing about in a foolish manner for seemingly no reason. And that was a great shame.

It made 4 feel special, though, in a way. What he knew about you, very few else seemed to. You were a source of intrigue for him, like a book — except, he didn't really need to read you, because he already felt he knew the contents by heart. You were like a song he wanted to play on repeat, like a video he could just keep on watching, entranced in all its beauty.

You were always so curious and intelligent. It made you exciting, fun, and interesting to be around, because, unlike what others assumed, your skull was not empty. It was just easier and more fun to let them think that way. But 4 was not so easily fooled, and he loved that he was able to get to know the wonderful soul that was you.

5:

You were upbeat and idealistic.

It was like a breath of fresh air. Whenever he was following a request from 1 or 8, he would find himself getting stressed out. They would use intimidation techniques, and he'd force himself to tinker for hours on whatever they wanted fixed, or stay hyper-focused for hours on his watch, resulting in incredible fatigue. He'd slump down the hallways afterward, searching for his room so he could recharge for a while, hoping he wouldn't run into anyone else.

He'd make a sudden turn, and you'd be right there, back turned to him as you placed a few flowers over his doorway. You'd sense him there, but without even double-checking who it was, you would smile, never even tensing up, never worrying over the danger of someone sneaking up on you.

"Oops," you grinned. "You got me!"

You were always so innocent, so naively optimistic, and it sent butterflies through his stitches. All of the stitchpunks were affected by the war — either they were hardened, like 1 and 8 and 7, or they were anxious, like the twins and 5 and 6. Or both. Even 2, although he didn't let it show that much, told 5 he still had recurring nightmares about the battle 5 lost his eye in.

But you had managed to walk through this deserted land with a hopeful smile on your face, never seeming to know the darkness that lay beneath. You helped him forget all of his nightmares and woes.

He loved how your idealism led you to live the happy, optimistic life you lived. Your smile could mend the rest of their broken souls, and make them forget they were ever broken. Anytime a fight occurred, you were never disturbed by the outcome, and you always fought back his quiet pessimism with words so sweet and pure he couldn't believe he hadn't thought that way before. Your idealism shaped you into someone who would always improve his mood, and who would always be able to understand and reassure him when he felt down. He loved your idealism the most because it was your power source — without it, your smile would be empty, your tone would be as hesitant as his, and his world would once again be filled with anxiety and rough souls.

You did lots of little things that others never seemed to notice, but that you deserved credit for.

You kept the Sanctuary both clean and aesthetic. You changed the decorations on a daily basis, always making the daily trip around the building feel more exciting than it otherwise would be. You had a particularly good eye for decoration, and by now, everyone knew it. When it grew colder outside, you took red fabric and strung it up in the hallway to fill everyone's memories of warmth, and in the summer you decorated with soft, pleasing colors like baby blue and grass green.

Whenever you found someone upset, like 6 after his hard work was ruined, you never shared in their misery. You overturned it. You'd help clean up, never blaming 8 for the mess, or whoever had caused the accident — you looked on the bright side, your eyes always shining with hope.

You were upbeat and idealistic. Always the light in the dark, the river in the desert, the air in the void. He loved the way you made him feel, and cherished your every presence. He never wanted to let you down, and swore to himself never to let anything wipe that smile off your face.

6:

You were strong-willed and reliable.

Whenever he needed you, you were there. If he screamed at night, you came to fight off his fears. If he spilled ink over a drawing that meant a lot to him, you comforted him. If he was bored of being in the same room all the time, but afraid to go off on his own, you accompanied him.

You listened to him instead of using soft, slow words to tell him no, like he was a child. Yes, he was excitable sometimes, and yes, he had gone through a lot and needed extra care than some others, but he wasn't stupid. You didn't treat him like he was.

He loved that about you — you made him feel validated, which only the twins and 9 had ever done. But he didn't just love you for helping him. You weren't just a therapist to him. He also loved you for your strong will.

You were stubborn in the same way as 7 and 9 — you weren't stubborn for the sake of argument, but because you weren't going to let anyone push you around. It was an admirable trait that he often wished he possessed. He was a pushover, he knew, but mostly because his mind was always somewhere else, and he rarely CARED how others would treat him, at least, until as of late. But you weren't. You were bold and fierce, but that didn't take away from your sense of right and wrong. As stubborn as you could be, you would rather agree with 1 than betray your ideals. It took bravery and wisdom to be the person that you were, and it thrilled him to watch you interact with the world, always comfortable in your own cloth.

These two core traits of yours were interchangeable, in a way. You were reliable because you were strong-willed, and you were strong-willed because it kept you reliable. If it were easy to change your mind, you wouldn't be as dependable.

There was a deeper reason he loved these traits, and quite frankly, it was because he was a weak soul. You were the strength he never had, giving him the power to stand up for himself. He had a natural attraction to those who had power — it was why he stayed in the room so close to where 1 and 8 resided, even though they treated him like dirt. He admired power.

You were the beautiful embodiment of those ideals, and for that, he couldn't help but fall for you.

It was a new day, and 6 had decided to take a walk through the Sanctuary on his own, without you. It was a small step, one he'd done before, but one he never felt completely confident doing. It was only made worse when he ran into 8, who he'd been doing a good job avoiding. 8 raised an eyebrow, and 6's internal panic started. He began to back away, small backward steps, as 8 took a few toward him, opening his mouth to speak. 6 didn't know if he had hostile intentions, but he didn't want to find out.

But then, 6 heard a movement behind him, and there you were, standing tall and confident with blazing eyes fixed upon 8, your hand on 6's shoulder. You gently pushed him behind you, and when 8 didn't make a move, you grabbed 6's hand and pulled him in the opposite direction.

"You're not hurt, are you? Did he threaten you?" You had the look of murder in your eyes. He shook his head, squeezing your hand and smiling.

"I was going to see 2's lab."

"Then what are we waiting for?" You turned and started navigating your way there, smiling at the strengthening of his hold.

You were strong-willed and reliable. You made him feel more like a person, and less like a living omen of terror. You could always be counted on, even when he didn't think you could solve an issue, and he would always admire the determination with which you faced the world. He loved everything about you, but this most of all.

8:

You had an affectionate nature.

It was simply who you were — cuddles and hugs came as naturally to you as breathing and eating. You loved wearing your heart on your sleeve, because the world became more intimate and real when everyone didn't fake or hide their emotions. You loved the warmth that emanated from inside you when you expressed your love for someone, and you were generous enough to shower your friends with comfort and attention.

If 8 had to describe you in a single word, it would be affectionate. It wasn't a word he'd known, up until he heard it in a conversation between 7 and 2 and asked what it meant. They had said your name, and he'd demanded to know what it was all about — rather forcefully, actually, more than was necessary. It turned out, they were just describing the last day, when you and given 2 a large hug. Upon hearing the reflection, 8 frowned, feeling slightly bothered that you hugged someone that wasn't him. But you probably hadn't meant any harm. You just loved touch — you gave massages for free, and touched others on the shoulder constantly. It had nothing to do with who, or why. You just really liked it, and that was all.

8 never really liked any of the other stitchpunks. He rarely paid them any mind. He was a single-minded individual, focusing more on his duty than on the others, who just seemed to get on his (and 1's) nerves. He was a loner, only really connecting to 1 and 6, the other less social stitchpunks of the group. He wasn't created for socializing, he was created to be a guardian for the weaker stitchpunks, and so he rarely engaged in physical contact with any of them. Definitely not in any positive way.

Until you came around.

You introduced him to the concept. It started with that one hug, and then the massage. He never knew such a good feeling could come from another living being — he'd come to accept that happiness could only come from his magnet, and sleep.

You taught him otherwise, and it left him in an awkward position. He'd never owed anyone before — except maybe 1, for giving him something to do. He wasn't really sure how to even thank you, as he'd never had to utter the words before. He grew to love the cuddles and hugs

you gave him just as much as, if not more than, the massages that soothed his aching shoulders and back.

He started initiating the contact, becoming touch-starved when you were away for too long. Just a light touch of the arm, and his soul felt light as a feather. You would smile so sweetly up at him and wrap your arms around his, hugging it to your chest. All his stress melted away, placing him in the here-and-now.

But it wasn't just the physical contact. He loved your affectionate words, the tone of your voice, your body language — they were all little pieces that came together to fit the puzzle of love, a puzzle he used to scoff at.

You were just so easy to love, and it made every moment between the two of you feel so right. The only part about this, his favorite part about you, was that he didn't want anyone else to take advantage of your lovingness. He knew you cared deeply for everyone around you, and he worried that compassion would hurt you in the future.

You had an affectionate nature. It came as easy to you as breathing, unforced and unapologetic. Affection was something he never thought he'd get to feel, something he never thought he'd like, and now it was everything he wanted. As long as the one giving it was you.

9:

You were incredibly thoughtful.

With everything you did, you thought of other people, and whether or not you wanted it to show, it did. 9 let his fingers run along the edges of the teal blanket you'd crocheted for him. It was just the right size, enough for his body to fit right under, but also for him to hook the end around his feet, without pulling any of it away from his chest. He didn't know when you'd done the measurements, or how you'd known exactly how much extra length to give, especially since there hadn't been any other blankets (just sheets) before. It was a lovely gift, one that took effort and a lot of thought, considering you even chose the color to match the cover of his favorite book.

And then, when 5 found out and mentioned the blanket to 2, who mentioned it to 7, who told the twins — well, practically everyone found out who the great crafter was. You received a request or two, and ended up making a blanket for every single one of the stitchpunks, including 1, whom you disliked about as much as he disliked you. Each of them was colored to fit their stitchpunk owner — 1's was a royal red, to match his cape, and the twins had theirs light blue to match their hoods.

Your thoughtfulness seemed to know no bounds. Any time you heard of a conflict, you sought out a solution. When 2 was missing a tool he wanted, you found 7 and started out on a week-long mission to make sure it was found. When 8 lost his magnet, you gathered up the whole group and had them all searching for it. When it turned out 7 had stolen it as a prank,

you managed to guilt her into returning it with a heartfelt apology. Whether or not 8 accepted the apology (he didn't), you did whatever it took to achieve peace in your community.

It was clear, whenever you invited him for an activity, that you'd put a lot of thought into it. You'd have the start and end times down to a tee, as well as all the materials prepared.

If you were scavenging for a few days, you had safe camp sites picked out, and soft makeshift beds already prepared. You had an extra bulb at the ready in case your light source broke or died, and you had several hidden piles of items throughout the Emptiness, whether inside long tubes or buildings or even the remains of destroyed machines. But you liked to avoid those, if it was someone other than 9 with you — it brought back bad memories in the others. Another key example of your thoughtfulness.

You were so sweet, but without being pitifully meek. You were thoughtful, but that didn't mean you only ever thought about others. You were dependable and focused when you had to be, and he could always count on you.

Sometimes he thought they counted on you too much.

He could tell when you were stressed. You acted entirely different when you were relaxed. When you let yourself go, it was rare. You'd forget the simplest things, and often make a clumsy mistake that would send you back into your anxious state of mind. You threw yourself into projects and activities, into fixing problems and making people happy, working hard and long and rarely giving yourself time to relax. You found crafting to be the closest you got to relaxing, because it slowed your mind, but also increased your awareness of each minute detail. You sparred with 8 sometimes, which cleared your mind but took up both physical and mental energy. You talked a lot when you were stressed, but not very much when you were calmer. It was as if you were worried about what would happen by NOT worrying, and didn't want to risk the potential consequences.

You were incredibly thoughtful. It was an undeniable fact, and though it worried him sometimes, he couldn't help but admit that it was why he was so drawn to you, and possibly the part he loved most about you.

VI {Your First Date}

1:

He didn't believe in magic. Alchemy was one thing — it had a factual, scientific basis and a very complicated sequence, like chemistry. Magic, on the other hand? Preposterous. If such a power existed, humans certainly would have used it to prevent their fate.

And yet, you seemed to cast a spell on him regardless. He could not say what it was about you that drew him in, that made him heed your wishes when it was he who sat in command. You had a natural, quiet sort of confidence in the way you moved, tiptoeing your way around him with a careless sort of grace, brushing up against him in a way that looked casual but felt 100% intentional. It was that sort of calculative behavior that drove him mad. Your gaze shifted, quickly yet calmly, from the point of contact to his face so you could smile playfully at his embarrassed wide optics and the startled turn of his head.

You could convince him of nearly anything, and today was no exception. Today, you had made it evident that you wanted some alone time, somewhere you'd never been with him before. He'd argued several times about the dangers of leaving the Sanctuary, but you merely stated that 8 could guard the two of you, and he couldn't keep complaining when you placed a gentle kiss on the side of his face.

So that's how the two of you ended up at the no-longer-lifeless pond, watching the still waters and the ripple effect that came from chucking a pebble across its surface. 8 guided you there, per 1's request, and stood watch a fair distance away as the two of you sat side-by-side on the shore in peace and quiet.

“... (Y/N).”

“Hmm?”

“Why did you want to come here so badly?”

You leaned up on one elbow and faced him with a frown. “Why, do you want to go back?”

‘Of course, I didn't want to leave the Sanctuary in the first place,’ 1 thought, but he couldn't bring himself to say such words to you.

“No, I'm just wondering why you wanted me to come here of all places.”

You rolled your eyes and dropped on your stomach, your arm curling around him. He flinched at the sudden touch, but quickly relaxed and hesitantly laid his hand over yours. You gazed softly into his eyes. “It didn't have to be here; it could have been anywhere. But if you're going on a first date, it should be somewhere new, where you haven't been together before.”

“Date?!”

You tilted your head, stroking his arm. “You got a problem with that?”

1 opened his mouth to reply, but the pleasing sensation of your fingers against his cloth kept him from articulating whatever he was going to say. He sighed and turned on his side, pulling you in close enough that he could wrap his arms around you and you were curled into his side. You smiled as you nuzzled into him, ready for another nap. He allowed his features to soften and his eyes to close as he held you protectively.

“Of course not.”

2:

The reflection of the water was green, not blue. After all, the sky itself was still tainted by the polluting gas of the long-gone war. But there was still something beautiful in the way it shone, something nice in the way the water jiggled upon your touch, as if it still contained life. Perhaps it did.

Water was the second big miracle of this planet, after life itself. It was one of nature’s most attractive bodies, in your opinion. You had wanted to go somewhere you could relax by a body of water, and 2 had taken you there as soon as he could. You were a natural loner, and the secluded area in the Emptiness calmed you, but that wasn’t why you wanted to be there.

You wanted to get closer to 2. You were annoyed with yourself for not expressing how much you wanted to be with him, and when you came to his room at sunrise with the nervous question, he looked like the happiest stitchpunk in the world. He spun you in a circle in his excitement, apologizing once he’d come back to his senses, but you were smiling to show there was nothing to forgive.

“So... where do you want to go?”

You sat perched up on a rock at the edge of the water, gazing at your reflections in the water. 2 was by your side, your hands intertwined but otherwise there was no contact — he was taking it slow, making sure you were content, dreading the day he did something to upset you. Not that you thought he could ever upset you.

“(Y/N)...”

“Hmm?”

He leaned a few inches closer, only barely touching your arm with his. You flinched, but when he went to move back, you leaned toward him until your arms brushed against one another again. He shared a loving smile with you.

“I think we should do this more.”

You nervously crossed your wrists over your leg, putting more of your weight against him. Both of you could feel your souls thumping from within, like a hyperactive heartbeat.

This relationship was new, and fear often accompanied the new. You felt all your usual anxieties — anxiety over messing up, over 2 slowly losing his fascination with you — but you thought that, for this moment, it was all worth it. What came later, came later — this was now, and you were going to try and push those thoughts away and enjoy it.

You uncrossed your hands and hesitantly placed the one over 2's. He held it gently, and you relaxed into his loving touch.

“Me too.”

3:

Never had there ever been a sunset that wasn't beautiful. Today was no exception — thankfully. Because this day was a special one.

3 had been wanting to sit with you on the roof. At first, you'd been concerned, not understanding why the view from up high would be better than the view from the ground, where you could be safe and stable. But 3 insisted almost every day, and you gently told him no, afraid he might fall and never wake back up. Still, it wasn't easy to look at his crestfallen expression, so you promised him, “One day, we'll go up there together. Just not now.”

The next day, he gestured toward the roof as the two of you were reading a book about samurai history and techniques. You shook your head, turning your eyes back to the pages before you could see his sullen face. “One day. Just not today.”

Well, the day had finally come when you knew you couldn't say no any longer. You were wanting some alone time with him anyway, someplace different than the steps of the library, and you knew that going anywhere else first would just hinder his happiness. When you told him, it was like watching a kid on a Christmas morning high.

You climbed up there first, searching for a steady surface. The roof was mostly rectangular and not so bad, but the highest point was more of a helmet sort of shape, and you knew that was where 3 wanted to sit.

You ensured its stability and escorted 3 on up. He scampered toward the highest foundation and plopped down on the spot before turning to smile at you, patting the seat beside him. You followed, hoping your memory would capture the scene before you and never lose it — the

joy on 3's face as he looked into your eyes, sitting on top of the world, the final rays of the sun streaking out from the horizon as the sky contemplated its palate for the evening.

You took your seat behind him, pulling 3 slightly closer to you so he wouldn't lose his balance. He eagerly leaned into your touch, squeezing you back with a sort of tenderness.

And then it was time for the sunset. The sun was sinking out of view in the distance, its orange hue faintly coloring the sky and horizon just above. Stars had popped up all around, and the moon was visible now, trading places with the sun, which finally vanished completely, its traces of light slowly trailing after. It was a slow but breathtaking process — one that entranced you for so long, you forgot how close you and 3 were to one another, and how subconsciously you'd pulled together in the cool of the night.

3 gazed into your eyes at the end of nature's performance, and you could feel the intense emotions behind those optics. You found his hand and squeezed it, and before you knew what had happened, he'd kissed your cheek before sprinting off back the way you'd come, vanishing into the attic.

Shocked, you touched the fabric of your cheek where he'd touched you, trying to hide your soft, embarrassed smile from the world, as if worried it would find the reason you smiled and try to take it away.

3 was your one weakness, but you would never give him up — no matter how hard things became.

4:

"This castle was built in just the last century, believe it or not," you explained. Your eyes were like stars, glowing with curiosity as you ranted on and on about your destination. Not that he minded it — in fact, he loved it. He loved you.

He stared up at you, watching your mouth as it formed the words excitedly and feverishly. He loved your passion — he loved that the two of you were going somewhere you were interested in, where he'd get to see your enthusiasm for as long as he wanted.

7 was nearby, guarding the two of you while also being distant enough to avoid eavesdropping. She knew this day was supposed to be just the two of you, and she didn't want to ruin it. 3 had been left at the Sanctuary for his own safety, although he hadn't been too happy about it, being babysat by 2 and 5. But at least his moodiness hadn't dragged you down.

You intertwined your hands and 4's, grinning at his cute wide-eyed look at your touch. You swung your arm forward and backward with every step, causing 4's to move along with you.

“It was named after an opera singer — you know, those people who sing incredibly loudly and high pitched, without sounding absolutely terrible? That’s skill, by the way.”

4 was suddenly very aware of your hands and his, and his grip loosened as he turned his head away from you shyly, as a nagging voice inside him began to question why he was worth all your attention. Even though you were immersed in your story, you noticed this tiny detail, and gently nudged him so he’d look at you again, with his adorable awkward smile. You shared a brief moment of sweet silence with locked eyes. Together in the Emptiness, you felt whole. 4 was glad that he’d decided to leave 3 behind, because it gave this day a more personal, romantic sentiment — one that he knew deep down that you wanted, and he was often too nervous for.

Then 7 spoke up. “We’re here.”

You turned your head and gazed upward, seeing the gorgeous white walls and the blue roof, surrounded by a once-luscious green forest, now dead and lifeless but with the air of mystery and enchantment.

You’d read so much about it, but seeing it in real life was a whole other story.

4 gazed in awe at the dreamlike palace in the distance, his eyes flickering with interest. You tightened your hold on his hand and dragged him into your chest, embracing him with an excited tension in your grip.

“We’re almost here! Was I right or was I right? You wanna see more of it, tell your brother how jealous he should be? Come on! Let’s get going!”

You released him from your hug but not from your grip — not that he would have tried to escape your touch, anyway. Never again would he let himself run away from you, and miss out on the beauty of (Y/N).

He agreed with your statement; his brother definitely should be jealous. But not because of some castle — rather, because he didn’t have you.

5:

Out in the Emptiness — the forbidden lands, full of uncertainty, loneliness, and potential danger.

It was a place 5 never imagined himself going on his own, not without a valid life-or-death reason, for him or for someone else. Nothing else, he assumed, would be worth risking 1’s wrath.

Nothing except you.

The idea, of course, had been yours. It was one of those days when he and 2 were in the lab, working on some new design — this time, advanced gliders, so you could travel further distances in less time. It was an idea you loved, that you would have been invested in — however, you were feeling extra affectionate, and you craved more of 5's attention.

"5. Fiiiiiiiiiii-iiiiiiiiive." You waved your hands in front of his face as he tried hopelessly to focus on his blueprint. "Hey. I wanna go somewhere. Can we go somewhere today? You've got time, right?"

"(Y/N), I'm kind of busy—"

"Pleeeeeeeeeease~? I want to go somewhere with my maaaaan~!" You exclaimed. He hid his face, the heat trickling inward as you glomped him from the side, rubbing your cheek against his. "Come oooooooooon~!"

"I'd say go with her," 2 advised his apprentice, smiling with a good-natured shaking of his head.

"All right," 5 sighed, hugging you back with a smile. "I'll find somewhere for us to go. Come find me in a couple hours, okay?"

You nodded and bounded out of the room. 5 looked to his mentor for guidance, panic clear in his eyes. "Do you know a good place...?"

2 thought about it for a moment, and then his eyes lit up. "Yes."

"... Where are we going...?" you asked, gazing around nervously, keeping close to 5's side. His crossbow was in his right hand, while his left hand held yours.

"Just up this little hill," he promised. You nodded hesitantly, knowing 5 would always protect you from whatever dangers lurked in the Emptiness.

At the top of the hill, there sat an old record player, along with a case of records. You gawked for a moment, knowing exactly what this machine could do.

You grabbed his arm excitedly. "5! Come on come on come on!" You dragged him all the way to the record player, and set it up so that a jolly melody began to play.

You looked to 5, who was smiling nervously. "Do you like it?" he asked.

You simply curtsied, extending a hand to him. "May I take this dance?"

He stepped forward, bowing as he carefully took your hand in his. "You may."

You grinned, and pulled him in towards you while he was off balance, dragging him into an energetic dance.

You led him through a series of turns, steps, and leans, always keeping him on his toes — but never without a happy laugh and an affectionate smile.

6:

6 had dragged you to the library one day. It hadn't been without warning, but it was also very sudden.

You'd been speaking the other day about spending more time together, in other places. 6 had grown much braver and more willing to explore his surroundings over the course of your friendship, and now that you were in a relationship, he wanted to deepen the bond further, in a new and memorable way.

Humans had often gone on dates in various locations — amusement parks, restaurants, parks — but 6 had been most interested in movies. Movies were a strange concept — moving visuals that you could replay as much as you wanted, marked forever in history. He knew there were countless films in the world at one point, and had mourned the loss of such an industry.

You mentioned to him that 3 and 4 had catalogued a video once and were able to replay it for 9, and suggested that maybe they — or the library itself — had something that might satisfy his longing. 6's eyes suddenly brightened as if with the flick of a switch, but he seemed to quickly forget about the movie, suddenly asking you if you could sing him a few songs and take a nap with him.

It was a few days later that 6 bounded into your room and started dragging you to the front door. You didn't complain, but you weren't exactly eager, either, not having had enough time to wake from your slumber. Still, his excitement was contagious, and soon you were hurrying outside and towards the library, ignoring 8's confused shouts from the entrance as the two of you scurried away.

Fast-forward, and you and 6 were sitting on the floor with your backs against the side of a bookshelf, pressed up against one another with your arms linked and your heads touching.

The video was projected out of 3's optics, while 4 stabilized his brother and kept his face fixed so that the projection didn't move. Every once in a while, 4 would glance over at you and 6, cuddling against the shelf, but finally you grew tired of his stares and shot him a look. He didn't turn around again.

A different set of eyes turned toward you. It was 6, who had pulled away slightly and was now gazing up at you with his innocent eyes. He didn't say anything — he just stared.

“... Something wrong?”

6 didn't say anything — he just kept looking. Nervous, you waved your hand in front of his face. It took him a few seconds to focus on your hand, before he shook himself back to reality.

“You're happy,” he whispered. You tilted your head.

“Yeah... Of course?”

“You still will be,” 6 clarified, looking up at you with ecstasy in his eyes. You realized he had had a vision just then. You smiled and pulled him closer.

“You don't need your visions to tell you that. Come on, let's enjoy the movie. Focus on the now.”

He nodded emphatically, leaning into you with a big smile on his face. You did the same, enjoying the moment, enjoying your date.

8:

Gazing into the faded colors of the stained glass windows, 8 felt faintly interested in the minute details of the images displayed. He wondered how they had come to be, and whether the Creator had been a fan of art, as he had come to create such intricate and unique little bodies, both in physical appearance and in spirit.

8 wasn't nearly as interested in the answer as you probably were, though. He thought the images were pretty, sure, but he had never been able to appreciate distractions. Utilizing his sharp vision was his job as the guardian, and he was talented at seeing the little things others might miss. But he also felt it was his job to always be alert. (Partially because 1 beat it into his head half a million times.)

So, naturally, he was a little hesitant when you asked him to take you somewhere, just the two of you, to relax and just enjoy yourselves. He knew 1 would be furious if you went out into the Emptiness, and he also didn't want to be too far in case there was trouble. Still, there weren't many places in the Sanctuary that were relaxing, where you could be alone. 8 had to check with everyone's plans beforehand to make sure you wouldn't be interrupted, giving a few threatening glares when his intentions were prodded.

But finally he was able to arrange some alone time, and you seemed to love it. You were in the main room, at the far end of the aisle from the entrance. You'd looked shyly at your feet when you told him, “In the past, pastors would stand here and wed man and wife.” He didn't quite understand why you then gazed at him with a mischievous smile, but he still felt butterflies in his stomach.

You linked arms with him and started pulling him closer to one of the glass windows. He let you drag him along, watching your excitement with a small smile. The window was high up — too high for you to reach, even on 8's shoulders. You saw the pew and pointed to it emphatically. He nodded, compliant, as you guided him there. He sat on his knees while you hurried around him and climbed up onto his shoulders. He stood, and you crawled onto the pew. He jumped up a moment later, sitting behind you as you gazed forward at the rainbow colored stained glass.

"It's so pretty," you whispered, flopping onto your back, head in 8's lap. He blinked, then looked down at your relaxed face. You'd come to see the windows, but now your eyes were closed, and you looked just as content, if not more, lying on him.

"... So..." 8's voice broke the silence. "... are you happy?"

You slowly opened your eyes. "Yes. Are you? Because this goes both ways, you know."

"Y-Yeah," he replied. He couldn't deny the pleasant warmth he felt in your presence. It really didn't matter to him where you went — he just liked being with you.

You smiled sweetly. "Good." You leaned up and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, then dropped back down and used his left leg as a body pillow.

He sat there with the closest thing to a blush a stitchpunk could have, and patted your head with the biggest, most genuine smile anyone had ever seen him wear.

9:

You were a giver. You loved to give things away, loved to make or do things for other people, but you didn't get as much back as you gave. 9 knew this, and he wanted to give YOU something special this time, so that's why he invited you to join him in the Emptiness.

"Oh, okay!" You agreed cheerfully. "Is 7 coming along?"

"N-No, I thought... Maybe just the two of us? Like a date...?"

"O-Oh!" You looked at him with wide eyes. For a second 9 thought you were going to refuse, or that somehow he'd misjudged your relationship, but then you smiled shyly as you looked to the floor and said, "I like that better."

9 really wanted to do something great for you — to impress you somehow. It was a lofty goal, he knew, because you were so good at gift giving that he didn't know how to do something you couldn't do better. He decided that his gift had to be more than just an item he handed over to you. 9 was determined to make you happy.

The journey took almost a full 24 hours, though you spent some of that time goofing off, splashing one another in the nearby pond or taking a nap cuddled together in an old pipe.

When you got close to your destination, 9 had you close your eyes, and covered them just to be sure, as he led you to the empty house. When he let you open your eyes, you saw a little banner across the top stair, telling you your first clue — ‘Kitchen drawer’.

You gave him a confused look.

“I have three presents for you,” he replied, smiling. “But I thought it’d be a little boring to just give them to you, especially since we came all this way.”

“... Sooooo... this is a scavenger hunt?”

“Yep.”

“Sweet! I’m so stealing this idea for 7’s birthday,” you replied. You ran past him, grabbing his arm at the last second and nearly knocking him over with your momentum. “Come on, you’re going, too!”

“All right, all right, I’m coming!” He laughed.

The hunt had you going from one of the kitchen drawers to under the bed in an upstairs bedroom, to under the stairs of the basement, to under a mug on the living room table, to the top of the sink in the bathroom, and then finally back to the living room, where the first present was revealed to be under the couch.

You dragged the little box out with an exhausted huff. “This... all for the... first one?!” You couldn’t lie, it was fun running around while 9 smirked and made jokes (but was also forced to undergo the same fatigue) — but you weren’t sure you could handle searching for the other two presents without taking some time to breathe.

9 shook his head. “Don’t worry; you don’t have to go looking for the other two. They’re right here.”

You opened your mouth to ask where, but he said, “Open it.” So you did.

Inside was a cute little patch of fabric, a blue square with green letters knitted into it: ‘I love you’. You smiled and hugged it to your chest, a little embarrassed. “You didn’t have to go through all this work for me...”

“That’s only your first gift. Do you want the next two?”

“... Yes.”

Before you knew what was happening, he was right in front of you, pulling you into a tight hug. You melted in his arms, but then dug your face in his chest, feeling your face heat up

with the closeness.

“That’s gift number two. You ready for gift number three?”

You nodded, already having a vague idea of what gift number three would be. He tilted his head and moved in to kiss your cheek, and in a fit of panic (or was your subconscious just really brave?), you moved your head just enough that your kiss became a mutual gift.

VII {When The Others Realized You Were Dating}

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1:

He'd hoped to keep it a secret. If not forever, then at least for a few days. It was awfully embarrassing, having the constant attention of those fools, with their teasing smiles and taunting gestures. They'd never take him seriously anymore, knowing what the two of you'd been doing.

Alas, nothing could be hidden for long. You'd been on your journey back from your date, walking hand-in-hand for some time with 8 a little further behind you. It wasn't feasible to hide your relationship from 8 anyway, and it was more important to stay safe. Still, every time he looked back, he felt like 8 was glaring at you, rather than watching his surroundings. Without realizing it, his grip on your hand tightened — but you didn't complain.

When you got closer to the Sanctuary, he let go of your hand, not wanting the others catch sight of it. You didn't see what the problem was; you didn't want him to be ashamed of you, and you believed that deep down, he wasn't. But he was insecure about how the others viewed him, and a leader shouldn't have any weaknesses; romance was, in his eyes, a weakness that others could exploit. Not that the other stitchpunks would, but he felt like they'd look down on him, rather than up, if they knew of your relationship. (He didn't consider the opposite might occur.)

Everything fell apart as soon as you returned to the Sanctuary. The others had, unfortunately, noticed his absence. It wasn't often that 1 wasn't in his room or at his throne, and when they couldn't find him anywhere at all — nor 8, nor you — the smart ones were able to put the pieces together. It was shocking that 1 would leave the Sanctuary, but of course he would do it for you.

When you came back, 5 had been on watch, and he'd summoned the others down to the entrance to greet you.

They were all wearing smug smiles as the three of you approached, particularly directed toward you and 1. You weren't holding hands, but you were still walking side-by-side, and that was all the evidence they needed.

Without openly stating it, you confirmed it all with your smile and 1's sudden nervous readjusting of his hat.

“Aww, you're so cuuute together,” 7 teased. “When's the baby coming?” She wasn't quite fond of you, but any chance to taunt 1 was worth it.

“Oh! Shush. (Y/N), ignore her; she’s full of flights of fancy.”

“I’m happy for you,” 2 stated, sharing a smile with you. “He’s a handful. Good luck.”

1 began to object, but you replied, “I know. Don’t worry, I can handle him.” You faced the other female. “And, 7... even if it were possible, I think I’m good. 1 is enough.”

1, flustered, turned his face away from the other stitchpunks and hurried up the stairs to the cathedral, his cape flying out behind him. The others cheered as he retreated, clapping and exclaiming their approval of your relationship.

You smiled at each and every one of them, accepting the praise before darting off after him, in the mood for another cuddle session.

2:

You’d spent a long time at the pond that day — and for many more days to come. It became your special spot, for just you and 2; it was like your getaway landmark, or your secret hideout, except it wasn’t expertly hidden or anything.

You’d go there once or twice a week, or whenever you were overwhelmed with the world. You could lay in peace together, and no one would ever know. It was just you and 2, always.

“The world for you,” 2 would whisper whenever you thanked him. It became your special words — they filled you with so much joy.

When you interrupted one of his workshops?

“I’m sorry,” you murmured, eyes averted. His heart leapt with his body out of the seat, and he sauntered over to you.

“No. No need for apologies.” He reached for your hand and interlaced your fingers together. “The world for you,” he promised.

When he tripped and you helped him back on his feet?

“Sorry about that; thank you.”

“The world for you,” you purred shyly, making him laugh.

The others didn’t find out about your relationship for a long time. At least, not many of them did. There were a couple exceptions — namely, 5 and 7. But that wasn’t surprising in any way; it would be difficult to hide it from them.

5 was suspicious enough by 2’s jittery mood. He’d given 2 his space, but 2 ended up giving it away one day, when he ranted about how much he loved you, and how you made him feel

complete. That wouldn't have been too out-of-the-ordinary, but then he had to add, "5, she is just so KIND, and GENTLE, and when we went to the pond on our first—" He'd caught himself there, but 5 probed him with a knowing smile until he extracted more information.

You were the one who told 7. She'd asked if there was anything new going on — and of course you had to tell her, because she suspected something in your embarrassed gaze.

She grinned proudly. "I knew it was gonna happen at some point! Congratulations! Tell me all about it."

7 and 5 were given nearly constant updates on your relationship, because you trusted them and knew they wouldn't try to crash one of your dates. The others didn't need to know, and they didn't find out for a while.

9 was the next to find out, from 7 when the two of them went out scrounging together. 7 had mentioned not to go a certain direction because you and 2 might be out there, before slapping her hands over her mouth — but it was too late. 9 looked shocked (once he processed the meaning of her words), but then he grinned and asked 7 for more details. Later on, he said his own congratulations, and moved on.

The others didn't exactly "find out" — or, at least, their reactions weren't very notable. 1 was perhaps the most shocked, not expecting that out of 2, but he figured it didn't really matter too much. 3 and 4 found out from 7, but nodded in approval and moved on. 6 was happy for you and drew pictures of you together, and 8 really didn't care. But that was fine — you didn't need their approval. You just needed each other, for whom you'd give the world.

3:

It took months before the others learned of your relationship. ... At least, until you became aware that they'd learned of it. You didn't come into contact with them much, because you didn't care about 1's Sanctuary. You only cared about your tight-knit family right here. 3 and 4 weren't exactly talkative either, so it was no wonder 7 was the reason everyone found out. You loved her, as you loved the twins, but you couldn't deny she had a tendency to gossip with those she liked. She was cold and distant towards 1 and 8, but with 2 or 5 or 9, she'd reveal everything on her mind.

You couldn't imagine being like that. Your mind was the only place you knew was absolutely secure. If you didn't take anything out, none of it could be used against you. That was why you were upset when you found out she'd told... well, indirectly, everyone.

It was a chain reaction; one person told another, so that throughout the next couple months everyone found out through somebody else. It was only when the twins wanted to visit the Sanctuary next, and you came along with them, that you even CONSIDERED your private matters had leaked into their common knowledge.

It all started with your entrance. You were on edge from the trip, so you noticed the peculiar glances 2 and 9 sent your way. 8's gaze, you could understand, since as a "guardian" (not that you'd trust him with anyone's lives), he was supposed to be wary of others. But 2 and 9 were looking at you and the twins with skeptical eyes, and you didn't like how uneasy that made you.

7 pulled you aside before the two of them could say anything, and nervously told you the truth. "They know about you and 3."

You were quiet and still for an unnaturally long period of time, processing what she'd just told you. Then, before she could even blink, you slammed her into the wall, eyes blazing. "What?"

7 winced, trying to hide the fear in her voice. "They know... Sorry?"

You felt a tap on your elbow. 3 was trying to signal you; his head was down, avoiding the eyes of all the other stitchpunks, who were gathered around and glancing between the two of you. You could see the questions in their eyes, and the unspoken (perhaps even unrealized) judgement, and your protective instincts took hold. You ushered 3 with you into the Sanctuary and up to 6's room, not stopping for anyone — not even 4.

Once you'd gotten him to safety, you made him look at you. 3 was anxious, made timid by their reaction. You hadn't thought the others to be judgmental, but you could be wrong sometimes.

"They don't matter," you told him; you weren't great with words, but you hoped your message got across. "What matters is you."

He reached up and caressed your cheek with his hand, as if to say, "No, you." You smiled.

A slight movement put you back on edge. You jumped in front of 3, but by that time you'd already registered the mover as 6, who was approaching the two of you with a gentle smile. He wasn't a threat, nor did he seem demeaning, so you allowed him to come close. He took your right hand and 3's left, and put them together, interlocking. Then, he quietly walked away, leaving the two of you alone.

You looked down at your hands, then back up at each other. 3's eyes flashed, cataloguing this moment between the two of you — you realized he hadn't done that earlier. He neither seared into his memory the looks on the others' faces, nor the moment when you scared 7. Only the important things — just you, and him.

You squeezed his hand, and shared another loving smile.

4:

Had 4 had his way, no one would know about his feelings for you except you and him. Well, that was kind of impossible with 3 and 7 already well-aware of your relationship; in fact, they'd known before he did himself! Still, he wasn't eager for it to spread to the others at the Sanctuary. 7 liked to gossip, sure, but you had asked her not to tell the others about it, in order to make 4 happy. You were fine with letting the world know, but you wanted to respect his need for privacy. It was cute, how much he cared, in his own way. He felt your bond was sacred, and he didn't want that bond to become less special by letting everyone know.

You did your best to keep it a secret, but you weren't exactly the best secret-keeper, even if it was your own secret. You let it slip during a conversation at the Sanctuary once with 2 and 5 as your only witnesses. You'd been talking about the fun you'd had at the library, and the word "date" accidentally slipped out. You'd frozen with your realization, hoping they hadn't noticed, but 2 pounced on the leak with excitement and pure happiness for you in his optics.

"You and 4 are together?" He asked, his voice brimming with hope. You chuckled, rubbing the back of your head.

"Um... yeah... oops?"

"Wow," 5 breathed out, looking shocked. "That's... wow. Good for you. When'd it happen?"

You couldn't really take it back, so you started telling them about that day, when you returned to the library to find 4 and 7 waiting for you. Thinking of 4 made your inner mechanisms spin faster; it generated a blissful warmth. 2 and 5 were amused at your account.

"I think you two make a cute couple," 2 smiled, going back to fiddling with some scrap metal. "I'm glad. Guess that means you'll be off to the library more often, huh?"

You giggled, plopping down next to him. "Yep~ You gonna miss me?"

You dove into some other topic soon after, forgetting all about keeping things a secret. Because of that, it wasn't necessarily 2's fault, but rather yours, that the entire Sanctuary knew about it by the next time you came back for a visit.

It was like a family road trip, with 7 and the twins joining you. 3 and 4 wanted to spend time with 6, and 4 was dragging you along for the ride. When you entered the Sanctuary and heard 5 started shouting down the hall to 2 about how "(Y/N) and 4 are here!", 3 sent you the saltiest glare he could muster. 4 hid behind his brother sheepishly, looking at you with betrayed eyes, and the guilt hit you like a sack of bricks.

"Oh, no — I'm sorry, 4, I-I guess it just slipped out last time..." You pleaded internally to any metaphysical spirit there was that you hadn't ruined it already. You dropped to your knees and clapped your hands together in prayer. "We don't have to see the others if you don't want to. Please forgive me."

You waited in silence — out of character for you, the others might say — for a physical response, hoping you hadn't upset 4 too much. You were surprised when he tapped your shoulder just once, and then pulled you into a hug. You squealed in joy and squeezed him back, maybe a little too hard. After a few seconds, he started struggling to get out of the hug,

but you just whined, “No backing out now, mister!” and he relented. You glanced up, saw that he had a smile on his face, and knew that everything would be all right.

5:

Obviously, the other stitchpunks were 100% aware that you were a couple. They’d set you up to begin with; there was absolutely no doubt in any of their minds that you would be happy together. That being said, they never knew when you started going on DATES together — that was another story.

You’d actually made a few trips together before they found out. It might have been because they gave you some space; they wanted you to spend more time together, but they didn’t expect you to go out into the Emptiness alone. 8 was the only one who knew, because the two of you passed him whenever you left and informed him how long you’d be out. He didn’t seem to care, unlike 1, who would have thrown a fit had he known.

Your first date, that dance to the music of the record player, lived on in your memories as one of the happiest moments of your life. The other dates were just as cute and fun, like your movie night (courtesy of 3, who was the first to find out), and your little walk around the nearby town. It was on your third, when you planned a trip to the pond, that you were found out by 2, who was resting there. He, of course, let everyone else know as soon as possible, and after that, any time you and 5 were out together, everyone would exchange knowing smirks and call you out.

“Where’s the next date?” 7 teased you once, playfully.

“When’s your next outing?” 9 asked 5 with laughing eyes.

“Make sure you treat her right,” 2 advised his apprentice.

5 blinked. “What, you think I’m not?”

7 was the one who came up with the idea of the “tip” jar. It was in 2’s workspace, and it was a large jar, about the size of them. Inside, anyone could put a slip of paper with ideas written on them about where you and 5 should go on dates, or other weird romance tips for either him or you. Some were clearly written by 7, and some were surprisingly written by 8 or 1. No one except 1 would write “Stay inside the cathedral for once so you don’t get us all killed.” Everyone else would wave goodbye excitedly as you left the Sanctuary, but 1 would always be the stick in the mud, complaining about dangers he had no proof of.

You and 5 enjoyed going into 2’s workshop just to read the slips of paper from the tip jar to one another. Some of them were good ideas, and some were simply jokes that made you cringe or laugh. But it was another bonding experience you wouldn’t have had, if not for the community that pulled you together.

Their support was embarrassing at times, but you were glad to have it. You and 5 enjoyed your time together, and thanks to the help of those around you, you always had something to look forward to.

6:

6 wasn't exactly secretive about your relationship. He attached himself to your hip, and everywhere you went, he followed. Maybe the thought occurred to the others before, but they clearly hadn't been sure. That, or they were just respecting your distance — a nice thought, but far too naive.

Only 7 and the twins found out immediately, which made sense, because they were there through it all, even on your first date, when you saw the film together. They never approached you about it, but they knew — how could they not?

That date was the only one you'd been on before the game was up. 5 needed the least hints; one day in the hall, he witnessed 6 kissing your cheek. You saw him and shot him a glare that left him paralyzed in fear. He got the message to keep quiet about it, but that didn't stop the rest from gathering their own evidence.

Once when 1 was criticizing you, 6 stood up for you with a ferocity in his eyes that left 1 speechless. He then dragged you off to his room before 1 could utter a word.

“What was that?!” You exclaimed, once you were in private. He turned around suddenly, leaving you only a second to prevent a collision, until he leapt at you with his arms circling your torso. You let him hug you for a minute, and when he pulled away, his shy smile was back on, almost like a mask.

Your eyes narrowed. ‘Wait...’

“He was giving you trouble,” he replied. “You help me. I helped you.”

He made it sound so simple, you were almost convinced. But then he nuzzled his head against your shoulder affectionately, and all innocent notions went out the window.

2 and 9 found out when they went to 6's room looking for some extra ink, only to find his wall no longer had a single drawing of the “Source” anymore. Those spaces on his wall were now filled with drawings of you, or drawings you'd made together, or ones you'd drawn with each other in mind. As 2 examined the wall, he couldn't find a single picture of any of the other stitchpunks — just you and him.

Needless to say, they were both very quietly supportive.

8 was the last to hear the news, when he overheard 1 complaining to 2 about 6's change.

“Well, he has nothing to fear anymore, so of course he’s changed. It’s a good thing, he’s in love. Haven’t you ever wanted to experience love, 1?”

1’s face would have tinted red had he been human. “Preposterous! Away with such silly words.” He flipped his cape and stormed out of the room, leaving 8 to quietly ponder what he’d just heard.

And by “ponder”, 8 simply realized the truth, felt a little annoyed at losing 6 as a plaything, and followed 1 out as per his command.

8:

Following your first date, you were riding a wave of joy so great you thought your chest might burst.

It was mostly your fault for not realizing that maybe he’d want to keep it hidden. You didn’t even consider 8’s isolation from the group, or that he might not feel comfortable with you sharing a private matter with your close friends. You were an open and talkative person, and he was not; he should have let you know, but he didn’t. It was a mistake on both sides, but it didn’t matter.

You’d happily told your friends all about it that evening, so everyone knew pretty quick. They shot 8 knowing looks and smiles in the hallway, sometimes adding a few sly comments about how cute the two of you were. He wasn’t sure how to feel about all that attention, and he bounded for the entrance after 7’s words embarrassed him too much to face her head-on. He sat on the stairs, staring off into the distance while trying to block out the thoughts and feelings that were overwhelming his mind.

1 hadn’t been too happy with the reveal, but when had 1 ever been happy? The twins hadn’t been around yet, but surely they’d know soon, and they’d be cataloguing every interaction between you and 8 that they saw. 2, 5, 6, 7, and 9 were all incredibly supportive towards you; 6 even drew a cute picture of you that you’d begged 8 to hang in his wall. But when they were around 8, it went from showing support to showing smugness and teasing, and he didn’t know how to handle that.

You came around some time later, smiling brightly with no idea the stress he was under. You gave him your signature greeting hug, and he reciprocated with hesitation that didn’t go unnoticed. You sat down on his lap and cocked your head to the side.

“What’s wrong?” You asked. He looked away, but you tilted his head back; he didn’t fight against your touch, but his eyes wouldn’t meet yours.

“It’s nothing.”

“No lying.”

“Really.”

“Really really?” You frowned skeptically. “Tell me what’s wrong or no hugs for a week.”

He gave you a strange look, as if he didn’t think that was the worst punishment in the world, but he sighed and gave in anyway. “You didn’t have to go and tell everyone that we... you know...”

You paused. “... You... didn’t want people to know?”

“I’m not used to it — people looking at me like that. I don’t like it.”

“I’m sorry,” you cried out, pulling him into another hug. “I didn’t think about how you’d feel... I’m sorry... I wish I could undo it.”

“It’s fine,” he replied, pulling your arms off of him so you could focus on what he was saying. You could get too emotional sometimes, and he didn’t want to be responsible for making you cry. It’d break him. “... I’m glad you were that happy. That you felt you had to tell them. ... It’s just... not my thing.”

“We’ll have to go on secret dates from now on,” you promised. “No one has to know, and no one can stop us. Agreed?”

8 nodded, relieved. Not that he thought you wouldn’t understand — he knew you would. He pulled you closer, and you let out a quiet yelp of surprise as 8 initiated the hug for once.

“Agreed.”

9:

Being with 9 was a gift in and of itself, but what he’d done for you on your first date was truly special. You didn’t think either of you could top the magic of it all, but that didn’t matter; you didn’t need an encore to know you were in love.

You were really excited about your new and dreamlike relationship, so you ended up telling your closest friends. You went to see 8 a few hours after you got back, as he was sharpening his blade.

“How’d it go?” He’d asked. You grinned from ear to ear.

“It. Went. Great!!! He likes me. I can tell he really does!”

“Well, of course he does,” 8 replied, not sparing you a single glance as he focused on his weapon. “You can tell by the look on his face. You aren’t hiding nothing.”

“Double negative,” you murmured. He looked confused, so you waved an arm in dismissal. “And his gift... 8, it was the sweetest thing...”

You started to rant about your time with 9, both on the trek back and forth and on your time at the house. He nodded and added a few comments here and there, calmly supportive, although he claimed once or twice that you were dumb for not expecting such treatment from 9. You argued that it wasn't being dumb — it was your way of not getting your hopes up. Which, he also claimed was dumb.

You told 7 about it next, who positively shrieked for you. She held your hands and spun you in a circle, expressing her happiness for you. She asked a ton of questions (“How was the trip? Did you hold hands? Did you sleep together? Are you already planning the next one?”) and gave you a big hug before you parted. You were so glad to have such a supportive friend.

Meanwhile, 9 had gone straight to 5 and 2, to whom he related the experience. They were both equally happy for him, applauding him for knowing the way to your heart. They had known you'd be dating, and assumed that was why you were gone for a few days, though he hadn't actually told them until now.

“1 was freaking out,” 5 admitted. “He won't tell you that, but I'd never seen him pace that much in front of the church. Next time, just let us know you're out on a date, instead of just going, okay?”

“Right,” 9 chuckled nervously. “Sorry about that.”

7 had told the twins soon after, and 8 was the one to inform 1. Everyone suddenly knew, but neither of you had a problem with that; it was your way of saying “back off, he's mine”, and his way of doing the same.

6 was the only one nobody told about your relationship. But, looking back on it, he always just seemed to know.

Chapter End Notes

[Once again, thanks for reading. I know this one was kinda bland, but I didn't think the story could move on without it. Now we can get into the cutesy stuff -- Your Favorite Thing To Do Together, Who He's Jealous Of, and When You Sleep Together. I have others planned out in the future, but let me know if you have any requests or suggestions!]

VIII {Your Favorite Thing To Do Together}

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

1:

One of the first things the stitchpunks learned about you was your love for naps. They'd known ever since 5 found you sprawled across the floor in the watchtower. He'd panicked, thinking you were hurt. You'd simply raised your head, murmured, "Shush. Nappy time," and let it drop back to the floor.

Soon enough everyone had witnessed you sleeping in a random spot at least once. Sometimes it was in the hall, sometimes on a bench or raised surface, sometimes curled in the corner of a room — heck, sometimes even in someone else's room. You didn't ask for permission — you just went.

Only once or twice did someone really complain. For example, once you crawled under 8's bed an hour or two before he came in and he plopped down on the surface above you. He was half-asleep when you woke and decided to go somewhere else. He heard you shuffling under the bed and saw your figure pop up beside him, scaring the life out of him for a few seconds. He made sure to let 1 know of his anger.

It became a popular guessing game among the group — where would (Y/N) be found napping next? No one usually actively went looking for you, but it still got a fond chuckle out of people when they happened upon you.

However, the majority of your naps took place with 1, together in a private area, such as his room. You'd sneak in together when no one was nearby — who knew the disastrous consequences of 2 or 7 spotting you? (You didn't think it would be that bad, but you didn't question 1; he felt very strongly about the matter.)

1 unfastened his cape and crawled into your bed. He preferred to keep his hat on, but you liked to play with the little poof on his head. It made him more cuddly, the less accessories that were in the way.

You took it off, ignoring his scowl as you gently laid it aside, then crawled into bed with him. You wrapped your arms around him and laid on your side, squeezing in close. He curled one arm around you, breathing out a tired sigh.

"Rough day?" You asked.

"You could say that."

You snuggled in closer, nuzzling your head against his chest. “Relax. It’s just you and me now.”

“Humph.” He settled himself into the bed, allowing his tense shoulders to fall loosely and sink into sheets. He felt the nerves in his chest begin to uncoil, and allowed himself to yawn.

He glanced down at your half-conscious figure; it seemed you really were tired, even for yawning. It melted his heart, and whatever nerves had remained were burned away.

He hesitated, glancing around as if checking that no one was spying on you, before placing a gentle kiss on your forehead. He closed his eyes, allowing himself to drift away, as you smiled into his chest.

2:

You enjoyed your alone time a lot. It was understandable, and he couldn’t really complain, if it gave you peace. He enjoyed the quiet, too; it allowed him to feel a sense of spirituality and ease with his place in the world. 2 liked to meditate, and it was something you could often do together in your room, where it was least likely you’d be bothered. You could sit and lose yourself in a state of peace; your attachment to the world became enhanced, revitalizing your appreciation of it. When you got in a mental funk, it gave you the confidence that things would turn out all right.

But there were times it wasn’t so easy. Sometimes the silence could be deafening. Sometimes the spirits were out of reach, and you couldn’t ignore the constant reminders that the world would never again be the same as it was during the human period. Too much had been lost to the machines; life became bleak and meaningless, and sometimes sitting in silence only exacerbated the feeling.

When this happened, all you had to do was tap 2 on the shoulder and gesture to your room, and he’d follow you without hesitation. You’d sit on your bed and let him gently hold your wrists. He’d stroke your arm lovingly, shaking away the feeling that you were all alone. As the two of you chatted, your fears would be submerged beneath your affection. You leaned onto one another and spoke of things you’d never tell another soul.

Eventually, this became your favorite thing to do together — relaxing in one another’s presence and simply talking. Hearing the other’s voice soothed all worries. Listening to the other’s point of view, thinking through life from the other perspective. Sharing stories of things the other could never have known. Laughing at the funny parts, smiling at the sweet, comforting at the sad, reassuring at the worst. Never leaving the other alone, never allowing the state of the world to fill them with despair. Never letting their gift of life become a waste. Nothing was ever wasted, if you picked each other up and made this world one worth living.

3:

You spent most of your time training. You, 7, and 8 had that in common. You were very focused on self-improvement and you didn't want to become weak through a lack of exercise. You needed to constantly sharpen your tactics. You trained together with 7 sometimes, playing a variation of capture the flag while trying to knock the other unconscious. But you were safe; it wasn't like you tried to stab each other or anything. 7 was more swift and agile than you were, but you were more powerful and your coordination was better. Even if she was moving fast, you could perfectly time a counterstrike and sweep her off her feet. Your execution was flawless.

You laughed about it afterwards, once the game was over and it was time to go back indoors. 7 would be joking about her mistakes and you would smile and gaze up into the library's door, picking out 3's hidden figure watching from behind the hinge of the door. He'd wave with a bashful little smile on his face that made your heart skip a beat. He loved to watch your performance. It was like a dance, watching you and 7 move around one another, reacting to each step and clashing weapons like symbols in an orchestra.

But his favorite thing was meeting up with you afterwards and watching the sunset. Every day after your sparring with 7, you and 3 would climb to the highest point of the library and watch the sun sink beneath the horizon. It was the one thing 4 never intruded upon; he could tell this was a precious moment not to be disturbed. You would be tired from your training, and this relaxing activity with your loved one was the perfect way to close a day of hard work.

You and 3 would sit very close, leaning onto one another with your eyes fixed on the dying light. You weren't even looking at each other, but it was a moment that could never be appreciated with someone else. After all, your first date had been watching the sunset together on this roof. Being here again stirred up those heartwarming feelings that brought you together.

You and 3 stared off into the sunset, allowing your love for one another to warm yourselves through the night.

4:

4's role as a stitchpunk was rather self-explanatory: "to teach us." He was meant to protect the memory of the past for the benefit of future life. Life would exist again; life always finds a way. But it would take a long time, and by then, whatever the humans had left in one piece would disintegrate. It would all be gone, and the new life forms would have to start everything over from scratch — mathematics, geography, astronomy, etc. It would be another tragedy added to the current one.

That was why 3's role was to teach, but he couldn't teach if he didn't know more than the others around him. He needed an internal library of fascinating and applicable data; otherwise, he would feel useless. Thus, 4 longed for knowledge.

It went beyond a simple curiosity. He fed off of textbooks, replenishing his boredom and easing his anxieties through pages upon pages of information. There was no need to fear the outside world, the unknown beasts lurking beyond his comprehension, if he stayed inside the library, where everything could be known. His only fear was the day he knew everything there was to know in the library. The day he finished those books, the day everything was committed to memory, was the day he would go mad with fear or boredom. He would have to go out into the real world, into the wasteland he was born in, and make new discoveries on his own.

Sometimes, this fear stopped him from doing his job. He would sit there in the library in silence, staring off into space as he contemplated the worst that could happen out there. He wanted to distract himself with reading, but he was scared to continue, scared to get to the end. It was a dreadful cycle.

That is, until you showed up. Your smile and joyous laughter took away those fears. He had something in his life that mattered more, that would give his life meaning even without his original purpose. Your presence returned the joy in reading, and with you, he always wanted to read and discover new things. He could enjoy his favorite hobby with his favorite person. You could show him the new things you'd found, and he'd watch the excitement on your glowing face. He would show you what he found, and you'd kiss him on the forehead and make his soul go all jittery. You could spend hours together in his comfort zone, where everything was regular and nothing was scary, except the emotions you made him feel.

His favorite thing to do with you was read in the library, close enough that he could see you safe and happy and always feel at ease. The only thing that made it better was knowing you felt the same.

5:

If 5 were asked his favorite thing to do with you, he wouldn't have a clue how to answer. He enjoyed everything you did together. From walking down the halls to playing hide and seek to pranking 1, everything was bathed in a gold light with you as the focal point.

He didn't know how to rate his happiness. If simply being with you would suffice as a response, that's what he would have to go with. His favorite thing to do was to be by your side, no matter the circumstances.

There was so much happiness in his life with you around no matter what it was you did. He didn't know whether the first date was equally enjoyable as the movie night. He didn't know whether he liked staying indoors more than spending time together outdoors. And why would he want to judge the time he spent with you anyway? It wasn't about the date or the activity,

it was about you. He was just happy that the two of you were together. Couldn't that be enough?

If he was left alone to ponder over it, the best answer he could come up with would be going on dates. A date could be anything; all it required was the two of you in the same place at the same time. There could be more people, or you could be alone. It could involve a lot of movement and energy, or it could be still and relaxing. It could be anything you wanted it to be.

You went on dates very often. You spent lots of time helping out 2 with his inventions, of course, but out of all the time you were free, about half of it was spent with the other. You used the "tip jar" the others gave you for ideas when things seemed a little too dull. You didn't like to do the same thing over and over, even though 5 reassured you that he was okay with it. When nothing good came out of the tip jar, spontaneity was your savior. Sometimes you grabbed him in the middle of the hallway and dragged him off somewhere at random, then pretended you had a plan. Making it up on the spot added to the fun factor, even if it wasn't much of dating material, and more like parkour in a storage room. (Not your best idea, but hey, it wasn't overdone or expected.)

You never grew tired of being around one another. Sometimes you were tired, sure, but you would never ask the other to leave. You felt comfortable napping together after a long day of work or play. You ended your days together, you in 5's arms as you latched onto one another and snuggled in close, comforted by the fact that you were always there for one another.

6:

Drawing was 6's hobby. It was no secret to any of them; in fact, it was the only thing about him everyone could be certain of. He knew some of them thought he was crazy. Some of them thought he was an innocent creature who could do no harm. Neither theory was true, at least, to his knowledge. They came from humans, and humans were not pure creatures, so what they created could not be perfect, either.

Still, the one thing they could be certain of was his fondness for drawing. Some called it a compulsion. Back when they were constantly in fear of the machines, 6 would draw the source, over and over and over again. It was all he ever drew. Now that he'd spent more time with you, he'd begun to draw other things — happier things. But there would still be nights when 6 couldn't avoid the nightmares, when you weren't there to stop them, and he'd go back to drawing the source. He hadn't forgotten what it looked like. He doubted he ever would.

The point was, drawing was 6's hobby, but that didn't mean it was his favorite. It had its ups and downs. It was a coping mechanism, but a coping mechanism that was tied to the bad memories of what made him draw in the first place.

Just as you brought happier visions and a brighter imagination into his world, you brought him a new favorite activity. This one didn't even require him doing anything; it was something he could do while napping, drawing, or walking.

Listening to you sing.

Music was something they hadn't had much of. Without instruments to play, a very rare access to a record player, and a leader who feared noise might drag unwanted attention to their home, music hadn't been a big part of their lives. 6 hadn't realized how much he loved music until it came from you. Your voice was the sound of angels. It could put him to a peaceful sleep. It could relax the tension in his body. It reminded him of hope and joy, something their Creator left them very little of.

Listening to you sing took him out of the present. When all was quiet and tense, your voice drowned out all uneasiness. You knew a variety of tunes, and came up with more on a regular basis. Your voice was made for lullabies, but at his request, you came up with longer songs with stories behind them, stories he could picture in his mind and talk with you about as you traversed the hallways. It gave him something to do that wasn't just drawing. It was something more special, something just between the two of you. And with that, he became more than just the artist, just as you became more than just his guardian.

8:

It was a surprise to him, and to everyone else, that 8's favorite thing to do with you was cuddle. Of course there was stigma about 8. Ever since his creation, he was deemed the scary one, the one who they thought could be described in one phrase — simple-minded bully. They were wary of him, and they had every right to be; he was almost twice their size. It was fun to play the part of the villain. There was a sense of superiority and power that he couldn't deny craving. Still, the game felt boring; he felt something missing in his everyday life. His separation from the rest of the group didn't bother him, really — they weren't that interesting, for the most part. But he did long for more stitchpunk interaction.

Being around 1 helped. Even if the leader didn't seem to care for anyone, 8 felt a kinship with him and was willing to lay down his life for him. (It was his duty, after all.) 6 also helped, in a way, by being so easy to mess around with. But 8 always felt the need to push it one step too far, so 6 would never willingly spend time with him like 1 would.

So 8 was used to being alone. He was used to not being liked, to not getting attention, to not getting physical contact with anyone and scowling at anyone who came close.

But then you came along and changed everything. You introduced him to the joy of another's company. You showed him that there was more pleasure in a person's touch than a magnet could ever provide. And you showed him that he could let his guard down and enjoy life without becoming weak like the others. That was something he could never repay.

That's where cuddling came in. It was something you loved to do, that you actually came to him and requested on a near-daily basis. Your attachment to contact was greater than his, and one day, with the brightest smile on your face, you'd confided in him just why — you were terrified of being alone. Feeling others reminded you that they were there, and that you weren't alone.

Hearing that was the closest 8 had ever gotten to heartbreak. He made a promise to himself — he would never refuse you when you came to him, because he would never know if, in turning you away, he'd bring back your deepest fears.

Cuddles became your thing. Sure, you offered them to whoever was in need, and you gave hugs aplenty, but daily cuddles were you and 8's personal pastime. They were your thing, and 8 treasured them as much as you did. Whenever you cuddled, 8 knew you were safe, and you never had to feel alone. He would do whatever it took to keep that smile on your face real.

9:

9 loved to be out in the Emptiness with you, experiencing the unknown at your side. Out there, you were at your element, fierce and beautiful, as fierce and beautiful as nature itself. He loved to watch your swift movements as you hopped over still stones and carefully avoided stepping on crunchy wrappers. You were elegant and wild, focused and skilled — 9 admired you so much, and he wished the others could see how strong you were. Maybe then 1 would stop giving you such a hard time about leaving on your own.

The adventures themselves were always exciting, sure, but they wouldn't be nearly as fun with anyone else. 7 was also a great companion, sure, but she could get on 9's nerves teasing him about your relationship, or about how much she despised 1. 5, on the other hand, was quiet and unsure of himself most of the time. He was a great friend, and 9 knew he'd always have his back, but it wasn't exactly fun, just business.

When it was just 9 and you, though, it was calming, relaxing, free. Everything just felt so right and natural. He didn't have to worry.

He also loved the louder moments, when the two of you were somewhere safer and could talk freely without any outsider input. These were the highlights of your adventures, when you could just chat, knowing nobody was around to listen in or interrupt. The isolation of the Emptiness made it the perfect place to be yourselves. There was no embarrassment, no caution, no ridicule. You could hold hands without running into any smug grins. You could be honest about your feelings, toward the rest of the group and each other. Whenever you had something on your chest, once you were alone together in the Emptiness, you could just blurt it out and nothing could go wrong. You could be yourselves, together.

9 loved your attitude when you were embarrassed. He loved coming up with new ways to embarrass you, just with his words and his loving touch. Hugs, back rubs, caresses, cuddling

— there was so much he wanted to do with you on these days, once you both arrived at that one house where he revealed his feelings for you.

So much to do, so little time. If only you could be gone longer without raising fears in the others... No, you had to return far too soon. The reminder whispered through his mind the entire time, as you snuggled together late one night under the sheets of a bed. It reminded him that he only had so much time, that he needed to make the most of it.

And so he tried.

Chapter End Notes

[Sorry for the delay! I know this sort of ended up as "his favorite thing to do together", more centered around your S/O than the reader, and the next one kind of is too, so sorry about that! Next Up: Who He's Jealous Of and When You Sleep Together, one of which is planned to come out within the next week. Let me know if I made any mistakes, or if you have any requests or suggestions!]

IX {Who He's Jealous Of}

1:

You were lying on your stomach, focused intently on the piece of paper in front of you. In your hand, you held a small splinter of wood. The endpoint was coated in black ink, and you were swiping it across the paper with determined strokes, like you had a vision that you just needed to capture. You didn't seem to notice his presence; you were too focused on your work.

He cleared his throat; you didn't react. Perhaps you hadn't heard him?

“(Y/N).”

You continued with your drawing. 6 glanced up from his paper.

1 frowned. “(Y/N), come with me.”

There was a brief moment of silence, as you examined your work, frowning at the sight of an unwanted smudge.

“No.”

“No?” He looked at you incredulously. You turned your head to fix him with a determined glare.

“No,” You repeated in your most authoritative tone. “I’m drawing with 6.” You turned your back to him and continued with your work.

He stood there for a few moments, too shocked to react. For any other stitchpunk, he would berate them for ignoring their leader, but when you did it, he was at a loss. He almost didn't notice the artist staring at him. The artist had a strange look on his face; it made 1 uneasy, so he scoffed and spun around. His cape flung out from behind him as he stormed out of the room and toward his throne.

After much contemplation, 1 realized an embarrassing truth. The reason he was irritated wasn't because you wouldn't listen to him. If it had been a matter of importance, yes, he would have been more forceful, but he had just wanted companionship. That was something 8 could do.

No; he was upset for another reason entirely. He was upset because of 6. 6 had been taking up more and more of your free time lately. You often chose to spend your days with him when you weren't asleep or reading. You were beginning to pay more attention to 6 than you were to your own... to your own...

1 couldn't even label your relationship without his face becoming a furnace.

1 knew the emotion. Jealousy. It was one of the most destructive feelings of the human race, rarely dissolving in peace without building up some form of chaos or hatred. 1 was smarter than that. He knew it was wrong to dislike 6 for such a petty reason. Yet, he began to wonder if 6 was turning you away from him. That thought made him more anxious than he'd been in a long time, since the last machine had been seen.

He didn't tell you about it. He went on with his day, and went to sleep in his room like usual. He woke in the middle of the night when you crawled into his bed and wrapped your arms around him.

"Are we okay?" You asked. 1 blinked away his drowsiness. His jealousy had died down in his slumber.

"Of course we are," he replied, not sure what you meant. You smiled and nuzzled the back of his neck.

"I love you," you whispered, and his worries of being replaced were swept away.

2:

You and 7 strolled around the Sanctuary together, whispering like two gossiping schoolgirls. It was nice to have another girl to talk to; being surrounded by boys sometimes made you feel like you didn't belong. Not that they tried to make you feel that way, but still. You and 7 had a lot in common, and you became really close friends. You would share your secrets and opinions you'd never discuss out loud to anyone. Not even 2.

Speaking of 2, he was well-aware of your friendship with 7. He passed by the two of you, noting how you shushed up as soon as you noticed him and smiled in greeting. Something about it didn't seem right. 2 wasn't an anxious person, so it didn't bother him too much. He smiled back and watched as you walked away, your voices picking up the further away you got. He wondered what you could be talking about, more amused than anything else.

But then it continued, and often. 7 and you became a duo of secrecy, never once letting anyone in on your conversations. Naturally, 2 was curious — curiosity defined him more than anything else. Everyone else was curious, too. 9 and 5 especially started theorizing to one another what you could possibly be saying. Dark, embarrassing secrets? Rumors about the other stitchpunks? Truths that you wouldn't even reveal to 2's face?

He didn't let it bother him, nor did he allow himself to assume the worst. But then 7 spilled a truth to him.

"You know, she's really wanting to travel with me to the library. You should let her know it's okay. She doesn't think she should go because you'd be left here, but she needs to start putting her wants over everyone else's."

"Of course," he agreed. "She never told me she wanted to go."

"Yeah. She doesn't admit much."

7 shrugged and walked away, leaving 2 alone to contemplate just how much you didn't tell him. At first, he felt a little sad, and then it turned to jealousy. Somehow, 7 had your trust but he didn't?

No, that wasn't the case. 2 squashed those feelings right away before they could take root. It wasn't right to be upset over something so small.

He decided to go and speak with you about it. He found you sitting in your room, meditating. 2 sat down beside you in silence for a while, before raising his voice.

"You know, it's all right for you to go out with 7 for a while. I'll be fine right here."

You looked down. "7 told you."

"Yes. I wanted to speak about that as well." He looked to you for permission before gently taking your hands in his. "It's all right for you to tell me. I won't get mad. I know that you and 7 are close, and I'm glad you're good friends. I want you to be happy. But if something is important to you, you can share it with me as well, or I'll never know what's going on, what I can do to help. Do you trust me?"

"Of course," you replied, pulling him into a hug. "I'm sorry I made you doubt it."

"All is forgiven."

2 was just glad there wasn't a deeper problem you were hiding from him. He hugged you back, hoping that, from now on, you'd open up so he could give you what you wanted.

"The world for you."

3:

3 sat at the entrance to the library and watched you and 7 spar outside, weaponless. He didn't quite understand why you would train without weapons; you wouldn't face any machine with your bare hands. Still, there was something mesmerizing about it. He loved to watch you training; you were absolutely amazing.

3 always felt pride in your abilities, but there was an underlying disappointment he felt nowadays whenever he watched you. It wasn't a disappointment in you, of course, nor was it in 7 — he was disappointed in himself. Compared to the two of you, he was pathetic. He couldn't fight. If danger approached, all 3 and 4 could do was run and hide.

3 realized that he wanted to become stronger. He wanted to be able to protect you and 4 and 7. If only he knew how, then he wouldn't have to run and hide or fear going outside. He could stand at your side, in 7's place.

He glared at 7. She was the only one who could stand by you. You could relate to her more than you could relate to him. You were both girls, and you were both fierce, strong, and loyal. You knew how to get what you wanted, and you would protect your loved ones with your life. He loved you for that, for everything that you were, but still... He almost hated 7 for it. He hated that she was something he never could be. She would always be your #2, not him. He was more of a damsel in distress at this point, and that was humiliating.

3 wanted to spend time with you that wasn't sitting in silence. He wanted to join you in your everyday life, to be part of your world rather than observe like an outsider.

He couldn't help but feel bitter about himself and his identity. 'To define us'. He was meant to exist in a permanent state of inactivity. But he wanted to change, to grow. He hated 7. He hated that he wasn't more like her.

Meanwhile, you noticed 3's quiet brooding from afar and told 7 to halt in your training. You both approached 3. You knelt down beside him and drew him back to the present, watching with curious eyes.

"Are you all right?"

3 simply stared back. It was times like these that he wished he had a voicebox. All of a sudden, his gaze shifted to the right. His face lit up and he snatched 7's staff that was lying on the ground. He held it up in a defensive fighting pose and smirked at you.

You were uncertain at first, but you quickly got on the same page and grabbed another staff of equal weight. He would be safer trained than left how he was now.

"Okay. I'll train you," you promised, watching his face glow with excitement. You couldn't help smiling back at him. "But we will be starting with the basics. Stances, body form and posture, and awareness of your surroundings before anything else. It may be difficult and it will take a lot of focus. Are you sure you're ready?"

3 nodded wildly. You led him out to the front of the library, where the ground was more flat and stable, and began teaching him form. A curious 4 stood in the background, watching in perplexity.

You brought 7 in for help gauging 3's proficiency, but you took charge, which made him very happy. His jealousy faded just a little bit, as now he felt one step closer to becoming an equal with you.

4:

4 was completely, undeniably, aggravatingly bored.

It seemed that his main job in life wasn't to teach, but rather, to wait. It felt like the majority of his time was spent anxiously waiting for your return. He couldn't focus nearly as well as his twin when you clouded his mind. Speaking of 3, he seemed to be in an eternal state of annoyance. 4 wouldn't spend time with him like he used to. It wasn't 4's fault; he made an effort, but it wasn't natural, and his mind wasn't always there. It was somewhere across the Emptiness, imagining all the possible things you could be doing at the moment. Wondering if you were on your way back yet.

But 3 was right there. Right there, and you couldn't focus on him. It wasn't surprising his mood took a nasty turn as of late. He spent a lot more time with 7, though, while 4 became more of a loner. It gave him time to think.

4 wished that you'd stayed at the library. What was so great about the Sanctuary, anyway? 1's rule was the reason 7 took them and left, and it was still going on even now. Maybe 1 had become a bit less restrictive now that the machines were gone (but were they?), but still. It didn't sound appealing to live under the same roof as 8, either.

Why did you like to go there so much? 4 wondered if the reason could be 2. He felt jealousy flaming inside as he pictured 2, the friendly, always-jolly inventor. 4 knew of your close friendship with 2. 4 had been to the Sanctuary only a couple times in the past several months, when 7, 3, and you made the trip together. He knew you spent most of your time there with 2, handing him tools, making puns and jokes, and flirting back and forth.

From your side of things, it was all just fun and games. You and 2 weren't actually interested in one another the way 4 thought you were. But 4 was still jealous that 2 was grabbing most of your attention. Not him.

It ruined his entire trip to the cathedral. He couldn't focus on cataloguing the changes done (decorations, furniture and object placement, etc.) in his mind like 3 could.

When he was alone at the library, like now, all he could think about was whether you and 2 had romantic feelings for one another, and whether you were hiding it behind his back. That would be worse. He'd rather you break his heart to his face than in private.

Finally, you returned. You were smiling at the sight of the library, your second home. It had been too long since you'd been back, since you'd seen 4. It was nice to visit the others, to

pester 1 and tease 5 and joke around with 2, but you couldn't wait to be with your cute little stitchpunk.

You walked in the front door, your mouth open to call for 4. Before you knew what was happening, 4 was latched onto you in a crushing hug. You hadn't realized how strong he could be until you were wheezing.

"4..." you hugged him back, a little more gently. He eased his grip on you. "It's good to see you." Your voice was emotional, holding all the feelings the words didn't carry. He clung to you longer than he typically would, bashfully averting his eyes. You knew something was up, but you didn't know what. It didn't matter.

You hugged him back as long as he needed, and then some. And if you stayed there with him a few weeks longer than planned, well, no one needed to know.

5:

5 remembered when he first realized his feelings for you. He'd been walking down the hall, and what had he seen?

You and 9, walking down the hall at an equal pace, smiling and chattering openly like nothing could be wrong with the world. 5 had read the bright joy in your countenance as love, and the jealousy festered in his soul. Over time, he learned that it was simply a platonic love, the kind shown to families and friends but not significant others like him. 5 realized that he was chosen instead of 9 — which was a real surprise, considering how 9 was the perfect culmination of all of their strengths. 5 still wondered at times how you were happy with him when you knew 9 was an option. 9 was far more confident than he was. Wasn't confidence an appealing trait?

And he knew you were best friends; did you really feel nothing more for him? Did he not feel more for you?

5 simultaneously wanted to hope he didn't and balk at the possibility. There was no way anyone could not love you. How didn't everyone feel the same way? They all set you up together, for crying out loud. They knew you were too good for him. Why didn't they try to set you up with 9?

He wondered if he was overlooking something. He started over analyzing your conversations, stressing over whether or not you and 9 made any comments with double meanings. He couldn't think of any, but his nervousness made him think he was missing something.

Once doubt sets in, it's difficult to prevent.

One day he was holding a screwdriver for 2 when the inventor noticed 5's hands were shaking and his eyes were distant. 2 placed a hand on his shoulder.

“All right, 5, set the tool aside a minute. I want to know what’s the matter. I can tell you’re not all here.”

5 shook his head. “It’s stupid.”

“Tell me anyway. I can handle stupid.” 2 smiled reassuringly.

5 hesitated before opening up about his feelings. 2 looked both concerned and amused.

“5, I’m sure nothing’s going on like you think it is. If anything, 7 and 9 are closer to matching up than anyone else here. I know I can’t tell you to stop worrying altogether, but don’t let it bother you or the others, okay? Everything will be fine.”

5 listened, but the words felt lacking.

2 eventually sent him off and 5 went down the hall, lost in his thoughts. He heard his name being called out in a sing-songy voice, and suddenly you were latched onto his back with your arms hanging over his shoulders. You nuzzled your head into the crook of his neck.

“I stole 1’s hat and now he refuses to leave his room. Did you know he has a poof on top of his head? It’s actually kinda adorable how flustered he gets about it. I think I’m gonna hide it somewhere no one else can find it, so he has to come out. It’s gonna be so funny. Also, 9 and 7 totally need to get hooked up, pronto. I have a couple plans but nothing definitive. I think we should get back at them. You know it was them and 2 who did that whole scheme to get us together; it’s time to turn it on them. But 2 doesn’t have a partner. Maybe we can pair him up with 1? I sense something between them and that’s the only option I’ve got, honestly. Anyway. One thing at a time — 7 and 9 are next. I’ll explain further once we’re in my room.” You stopped to take a deep breath, then sat your chin on his shoulder. “You good? You’re not moving.”

5 realized he’d been so caught up by your words — “9 and 7 totally need to get hooked up” — that he’d stopped moving.

You pointed forward. “Mush! Onward!”

5 smiled and continued onward. Pure relief swept across his face, his doubt beginning to fade. He decided to take it one step at a time, enjoying his present with you instead of worrying about the future.

6:

6 wasn’t a very jealous stitchpunk. He enjoyed his own life enough that he didn’t care to replace anything. Even his nightmares, which he would gladly escape if given the choice, brought him closer to you, who gave him more happiness than he’d ever had before.

Your relationship was nice because it was just the two of you, mostly. You weren't often interacting with the others, and if you were, there was a comfortable distance that you and 6 enjoyed. You weren't dragged into discussions or arguments or drama you had no interest in. Your closest friends were each other, and you rarely opened up to anyone else, not even 7. You barely even spent time with the other stitchpunks, except to further your own goals, such as training or scavenging for new weapon material. The world was separate from you, and you liked it that way.

6 wasn't even jealous of 7 for taking up your time. When you weren't around, it was usually because you and 7 were out on a trip somewhere. Those days were the most boring. Of course he didn't like it when you left, but he understood. You had your own life to live, your own strengths to put to use; you had a talent for more than singing and drawing, and you needed to put your energy and skill to use before you lost it. 6 admired that, and of course he would never keep you from bettering yourself. He would feel awful if he did.

6 didn't feel jealous toward any of the male stitchpunks, either. He was, strangely enough, one of the more confident stitchpunks, in a way. He never really worried about you choosing someone over him. Somehow he just knew you wouldn't. You didn't have good chemistry with the others, from what he had seen. You weren't rude, nor were you extremely socially awkward, but you just didn't click with them, and that was okay. The one he thought you were most likely to get along with was 9, but you hadn't even spoken much with him.

6 noticed a lot. He was actually quite observant, though a lot of it came from his own visions. Repeated dreams with hidden meanings. Nightmares that made him look at the others inquisitively. Visions of possible futures and memories of the past, in 20/20. It made him look more carefully at the people in the real world, wondering whether the things he'd seen were true and guessing the thoughts and actions behind each movement.

Again, he wasn't around the others too often, so it wasn't like he observed them that much. Still, he noticed how 9 reacted when you spoke up for him in front of 1. He wasn't sure if the long stare and weird smile he made was purely surprise or the development of something more. 6 knew that 2 and 9 seemed interested in you, but he doubted it would ever work out romantically, even if somehow the feelings were there.

6 wasn't jealous because he knew there wasn't a reason to be. He knew that you were his and he was totes, and he felt on some spiritual level that your bond was meant to be. You were tied together for a reason that no source of human weakness could take away, so 6 had no worries or regrets and was always happy as long as he was with you.

8:

“Um... (Y/N)?”

You and 8 turned around and saw 5 standing awkwardly a few feet behind you. His eyes were focused on you specifically, as if he was avoiding looking at 8.

“Hi!” You smiled brightly. 8 looked at 5 in confusion.

“Sorry to interrupt... (Y/N), can you come with me, if you’re free...? I need to talk to you about something for a project for 2.”

Something about his voice sounded suspicious to 8, but you immediately jumped to your feet. “Of course!” you agreed without hesitation. You suddenly leaned over and hugged 8 before standing back up and skipping off past 5, grabbing his arm and pulling him along. You had a merry spring in your step that 5 struggled to keep paced with. It was almost humorous to watch, but 8 had an unsettling feeling in his stomach. Parting with you always came with melancholic sensations that bewildered him. Today, though, was different.

Something about 5 put him on edge. As 8 watched you go, he couldn’t help but wonder if he was lying just to get the chance at talking to you.

Did 5 have feelings for you? After 7 teased him about his own feelings, 8 started wondering what he must have looked like, how someone could tell. He started looking at others more deeply, wondering what was going on in their heads. Was it an easy thing to read on others? Or was it just a girl skill?

8 wasn’t stupid. He knew that 5 was a nervous stitchpunk to begin with, but it still seemed like he was acting more anxious than usual. His body was shaking more than it did when he used to threaten them.

8 wondered if he’d acted similarly in those early stages of your relationship, and he hoped not. He already wanted to roll his eyes off his head seeing how fidgety 5 had been.

There were some traits of yours that worried him, too. You were a helpful person; you were often around 5 throughout the day because of this, since he usually had jobs that could use an extra hand. Also, you were an affectionate person in general, whether it was with 8 or not. He knew you gave hugs out freely and locked arms and danced a lot, and 8 was typically fine with that. But something bothered him about the idea of you and 5 hugging. The idea of you hugging people was fine, but the idea of you hugging specific people was not.

He knew that he shouldn’t be upset by it, but he was. He didn’t know why it was important to him. He knew that for a fact.

Either way, at least 8 had the reassurance that you would come back to him. Even before you revealed feelings for each other, he knew you weren’t one to leave anyone alone. He could rest in peace knowing that, since you loved everyone, you would always love him and would never leave him alone.

9:

You were practicing your sword-fighting skills with 8. It wasn't a rare occurrence. You and 8 had become very close over time; it was an odd combination, but one that you both seemed to appreciate. Typically you would just talk and 8 would listen as he sharpened his blade, but this time, you were taunting each other as you engaged in combat. You wielded two butter knives. They weren't exactly the strongest of weapons, but the end could cut someone who underestimated its sharpness, and your blows had enough power to knock your opponents back with the blunt sides. 8 had his blade, which you knew could do more damage, but you weren't afraid.

9, however, who was watching, was very afraid.

But not just for your safety.

He knew there was danger, but he also knew there was an underlying trust between you and 8. Neither of you would try to hurt the other, and you were well-aware of your own and each other's strengths and faults. It was unlikely you'd be badly damaged.

That's not what he was afraid of.

What he feared was the way 8 looked at you. And the way you looked back at him.

There was a closeness there that could not be disputed. It seemed platonic enough, but 9 couldn't help worrying. He loved you too much, and he feared anything that might snatch you away.

You and 8 spent more time together than 9 was comfortable with. You came to 8 when you had a personal dilemma, especially if it was involving 9. 8 was your confidant, but that was 9's role. He should be the one you turn to when you need a second opinion. Whenever the two of you were out exploring together, you shared so much. 9 almost was convinced you shared everything. But one day, he eavesdropped on you and 8 and discovered he was wrong. You shared things with him that 9 had never known. Fears that you weren't good enough, worries about whether you were becoming boring to 9, whether or not he liked 7 more than you.

It was all absolutely absurd, in his mind. There was no way he could ever choose 7 over you. You were too special. His heart had chosen you long ago, and nothing could possibly change that. He and 7 were simply close friends, nothing more. How could you not see that?

Then, it all hit 9. You were having the same worries about 7 as he was worrying about 8. They were illogical, sure, but no matter how certain he was of your affection, there would always be a little doubt deep down. That's what it meant to be human — complex, cautious, contradictory. As long as he didn't do something stupid because of it — as long as you shared these fears with one another so you could move past them — everything would be fine. They were just a result of your deep love for one another.

9 smiled as he watched you and 8. He would try his best to calmly recognize and logically deflect the jealousy stirring within him. 8 was still a member of his group, a friend, perhaps you could even call it family, and you were still his. And no amount of fear or jealousy could change that.

X {When You Sleep Together}

Chapter Notes

{“I was wondering, what if you did a scenario of the stitchpunks and the reader sleeping together (in the innocent way lol)? Like, say it was really, really cold out one night and the stitchpunks woke up from it. They couldn’t find anything warm to help them fall back asleep so they resort to going to their S/O to keep them warm? I was just wondering if you could make something like that because it sounded kinda cute in my head when I imagined it. But you don’t have to do it if it makes you feel uncomfortable or weird, I don’t want to sound like I’m pressuring you!” ~ Oliviajj470 on Quotev in October of 2019.

I am so sorry it took me this long to post! Please read the ending notes, and thank you to everyone who has supported this fun fluff-filled story.}

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

1:

He’d never been so cold.

Born in the first month of the year, you’d think he’d have experienced the coldest weather before anyone else. In a way, you would be right; it was January when the snow truly hit every year, after all. But that didn’t factor into this new, cruel, lifeless world he was entrusted with. The gas killed everything, and even rain was not a promised constant anymore, so he hadn’t experienced snow in his first few months of life.

Now was their first full winter, as the world remembered how to create life -- and how to torture it, he thought to himself, curling into a ball with his bedsheets pulled over him, still unable to get warm. He’d been trying for what felt like hours.

‘This is ridiculous,’ he thought to himself, trying to remember where the heaviest cloths were kept. It wouldn’t do him any good; 7 took those sorts of items without telling anyone and then never returned them.

‘How did creatures ever survive in this weather?’ He considered the animals he’d heard about, read about, in the past. They didn’t have fur to keep them warm; 1 wasn’t even sure why they experienced sensations such as warmth and pain in the first place. Hibernation -- well, if he could get to sleep, this wouldn’t be an issue! Warmth from physical contact...

He truly didn’t want to disturb you. You loved your nap time more than anything else. There was no doubt you were already fast asleep, but...

I paused, then swung his sheets to the side, braving the cold to step on the cool planked floor.

Perhaps you were cold, too.

You heard a light tapping at your door, as if the person on the other side didn't want anyone to hear them. Had you not woken from the cold to curl up more tightly into your sheets, you might not have heard it. "Come in," you called softly, hoping your voice was loud enough to be heard on the other side. You had a feeling you knew who it was.

Sure enough, I peeked in through the door, saw you were awake, and rushed in, hurriedly shutting the door behind him, probably to avoid being seen in the hall.

"What's wrong?" you asked, concerned.

"It's too cold," he complained. "I'm starting to think the Emptiness might be worth the travel."

You smiled, skirting over that comment. "So you want to cuddle for warmth."

I immediately began protesting. "This is a serious strategy!"

"Of course," you replied seriously. "I don't mind."

"Then what are you waiting for?" he asked, a bit impatiently as he drew his cape around him like a blanket, shivering where he stood. You lifted your blanket a little, expecting him to crawl in right away. You felt mildly surprised when he eyed you in disbelief.

"What are *you* waiting for?"

"I'm not sleeping in here -- you're coming to my bed," he stated, not willing himself to look you in the eye. The mere thought of rolling out from under your sheets made you shiver.

"No," you replied, rolling your back to him playfully. "Too cold."

"I made it here, didn't I?"

You briefly mulled it over, then turned back toward him. "Carry me," you commanded, reaching your arms out from under your sheets.

"Wh-Wha-?! Don't be ridiculous!"

"I'm not heavy. If you want me, carry me."

"Y- I command you to follow me!" I spun around and headed for the door. You poked your head out and stuck your tongue at him, then ducked back under the covers. "(Y/N)!"

“I gave you your choice,” you replied. There was a scoff, and then a few moments of silence.

Soon after, you felt your sheets begin to rustle and another body brushed against your side.

“I win.”

“Shh.” He clung onto you, and you realized from his near-icy touch that the cold was hitting him much harder than you. You let him be the big spoon and shifted just enough to give him more of the covers. His head tiredly fell against the crook of your neck, already halfway to dreamland.

“Good night,” you whispered, patting the arms around you. “I love you.”

“Good night,” he responded, softly. He paused, the words caught in his throat. You didn’t mind; you knew. You didn’t need him to say it.

“I…” He swallowed, then held you tighter, determined. “I… I-love you, too…”

You leaned into his touch, a warmth growing in your chest. “I know.”

You didn’t need to hear it, but you were so very happy you did.

In seconds, you both were out like a light, your combined warmth pulling you together through the long winter.

2:

Winter was cruel. The icy weather and frigid snow storms had everyone shut in the Sanctuary together. The twins slept with 7, huddling together so their combined body warmth would keep them from freezing. 5, 6, and 9 followed suit, with 6 in the middle of their trio, their bodies covered by a single blanket. 1 naturally hoarded the warmest fabrics he could get a hold of, which he and 8 each wrapped themselves up in to keep out the unpleasant weather.

Normally, 2 would have joined 5, 6, and 9, but there was a missing member of the crew, and no one deserved to sleep alone in this sort of weather. Had everyone else not been cuddling or enveloped in more blankets than one could naturally breathe under, neither of you would have gone to the other on your own, too concerned about disturbing the other’s slumber to put your own needs first. But, as it was, you weren’t going to drift away if you couldn’t be comfortable.

So 2 headed toward your room, pretty certain you wouldn’t be the one to initiate anything, but was surprised to find you in the middle of the hallway heading toward him.

“(Y/N)! What are you doing up?” 2 asked curiously, trying to stop his voice from shaking with the cold.

“Um...” You looked down, bashfully squeezing your arm. “I couldn’t sleep with it being so cold, so... I was wondering if you...?”

“I was just coming here to get you,” 2 admitted. “5, 6, and 9 are sleeping together to try and get warm. Do you want to join?”

You winced. “Ummmm... I...” You paused, then reached out and faintly touched his arm. “I... just wanted you...”

His face softened, a small smile making its way onto his tired face. “Then I’ll come back with you, if you wish.”

You smiled and lowered your head, avoiding his stare, but your arms latched onto him more, leaving the ghost of warmth in the contact. You led him back to your room, where you crawled into bed, sleeping face-to-face, curling up into one another as you allowed the heat to spread.

“We should do this more often,” you whispered as your consciousness began pulling you away to dreamland.

“Of course,” he responded. “Whenever you wish, however long you wish.”

“You spoil me.”

“You deserve to be spoiled.”

You smiled, allowing your forehead to poke at his chest. “Good night, 2.”

“Good night, (Y/N).”

And with that, you drifted off into each other’s arms.

3:

It was deep into the winter, and you, 7, and the twins were trapped at the library. Snow piled the ground about 18 inches tall, and it was a thick, hardened sort of snow that was difficult to cut through; you’d tried. It was amazing, how something so seemingly flimsy like water could actually be so tough -- especially in the case of ice, which you’d experienced just a few weeks before, when the snow coating the ground was barely half an inch tall. The twins had

enjoyed slipping back and forth on the ice, and 7 had found it mildly amusing as well, but you were too impressed by its beauty, its fortitude, to join them in on their playtime. You spent long days watching the shine of the sun reflect against the icy layer, contemplating what next nature had in store for you.

You'd take back the ice if you could. It wasn't easy to travel through this snow, nor did it seem like it was going somewhere anytime soon. You sat outside late at night in the cold, shivering as you continued your watch. It was mostly just for something to do; you were sure any intruders would have difficulty making their way through this snow, especially without making sound. Still, you sat up and pretended the cold air wasn't seeping through your fabric. You didn't like to show weakness, even if your only witnesses were 7 and the twins.

Unfortunately -- or perhaps fortunately, considering the outcome -- one of them noticed. You heard a shift from behind you, followed by some small footsteps that you identified as one of the twins. You glanced back to meet 3's confused blinking. Moments later, he paused in his flashing, choosing instead to grab your alarm and pull you inward. Not sure what he was doing, you allowed him to drag you deeper into the library.

He ended up leading you to the central part of the library, where it was the warmest. A long, thick scarf was laying on the ground, and 3 had it wrapped up in the shape of a blanket. You couldn't help but feel drawn towards it, your body so cold and yearning for warmth. So you relented when 3 brought you to it and eased you into the makeshift blanket. The warmth was nice, for sure, but there was something missing.

That something was filled when 3 squeezed himself into the scarf blanket beside you. He cuddled up beside you, not asking permission, not displaying any hesitance. You smiled softly; you'd come a long way together.

You curled up with him and fell asleep, sure that the peace would last till morning.

4:

"It's so cold!" you complained.

You were in the library with 3, 4, and 7. The winter storm had closed you off from the Sanctuary, but thankfully 6 had predicted the weather and warned you to drag a warm blanket with you all the way to the library. You'd been planning on staying for a while anyway; as much as you liked hanging out with 2 and the others, you'd been spending $\frac{3}{4}$ of your time with your partner and 7 at the library, where you felt more at home. You came to visit the others every once in a while, piss off 1 and avoid 8 like the plague, but 4 was where you would always feel home.

“Gaaaaah! Why is it so cold?!” You rubbed your arms up and down, trying to generate some friction. 3 began to flash a diagram about the sun’s rays and seasonal changes, but you quickly jabbed a finger in his direction. “Rhetorical question!” He frowned and flashed his eyes at you, as if sending curse words your way, before choosing to go browse a different section of the library.

Despite choosing to be in your current situation, you still felt less secure. There were no closing doors at the entrance to the library; they had been blown off long ago, letting the cold wind in. You shivered uncontrollably, freezing and bitter about it, and you hoped that 1 was suffering twice as much as you were right now. Your analytical brain solemnly told you he was probably living it up right now in the warmest, coziest material around, but you shut it down to indulge in the more preferable alternative.

“Ugh... I just want this to end,” you mumbled to yourself. Before you knew it, there was a rustling behind you. You glanced over your shoulder to see 4 had dragged the blanket toward you and was folding it so that you could sleep inside it without pressing your bodies against the cool wooden floorboards.

“Oh, hey, 4.” You smiled. “That for me?” He paused, as if contemplating the answer. He chose to respond by shyly pulling you by the arm toward the blanket.

You snuggled inside and stretched your body as far as you could with a loud yawn. “Ah, yes - this is what I’ve been missing.” You curled in on yourself peacefully. “Thanks, bud.”

What you weren’t expecting was for him to climb in with you and cuddle -- without you having to ask first. You were surprised for a moment, before your face widened into a grin. You took advantage of the moment, cuddling to your heart’s content together, thanking the bitter cold and hoping it would last.

5:

“5, I want to cuddle” was not a rare or startling thing for you to say. Which was saying something, because most anything that came out of your mouth was so spontaneous it could be considered startling to most. But cuddling in particular was a normal activity for you. You were quite affectionate and enjoyed nuzzling others, glomping them, hugging them -- whatever physical contact they were in the mood for. You were energetic and always buzzing around the place, but that didn’t mean you wouldn’t seek out calmer activities with the ones you loved.

So when winter struck and the chilly temperatures had everyone hibernating as best they could in their private rooms, with the warmest materials they could find, 5 was not surprised

to hear the playful knock pattern on your door announcing your arrival.

“Fiiiiiii-iiiiiiiive~” you sang, slowly creaking open the door, your face pressed up against it as you smiled through the opening gap. “I’m here to cuuuuu~ddleeeeeee~”

He chuckled and lifted his blanket. For a brief moment, the cool air reached him, and he shuddered as he felt his stitches contracting. Or maybe that was just his anxious mind making him feel more than he was; who knew. “Alright, come here,” he told you, and within moments you were leaping onto him, causing all of the cold to squeeze out of him like the compression of a closed ziploc bag.

“Cuddle time,” you giggled, shifting to adjust yourself in his arms. You spun yourself around so he was spooning you, then pulled the blanket right up to your nose, smiling in satisfaction from where you were hidden beneath the covers.

“Night time?” he asked amusedly.

“Night time,” you responded, your voice slightly more relaxed than earlier. As energetic and bubbly as you usually were, even you needed a nice, quiet rest sometimes, and 5 was happy to offer you the comfort you needed to get to sleep on such a harsh night.

“Okay,” he whispered, holding you closer to his chest, as he made himself comfortable, too. “Good night, (Y/N)...”

“Good night, 5...”

“I love you,” he murmured, so softly he didn’t think you would hear him. When he got a quiet, “love you too” in return, his heart swooned.

He had to admit, these nights weren’t so bad.

6:

It was late in the night, when you and 6 were humming a familiar tune as you drew from memory the events that had taken place that day. You’d decided to make a picture journal of every day spent at the Sanctuary, of every day of your lives as a collective group of survivors. Some days, not much happened, and you’d find yourselves drawing each other; other days, a change in weather was the perfect source of inspiration; some days, new information learned by the twins or 7 became something interesting to note; on others, there was enough drama and gossip involving either 1 or 9 that it couldn’t be avoided.

Your last activity of the night was always to make this quick log of the day, then to put your two papers together, and compile them in a secure location. 6 had a key to a secret drawer where you would hide all of your logs, piled up with the most recent papers on top, from right to left. 6 locked the compartment with a satisfied hum and a shiver and turned to you, a slight sadness in his eyes as he prepared himself for you heading back to your room.

“It’s rather cold out today,” you stated.

“It is,” 6 agreed, slightly hunched over as he clasped his hands together, as if that would bring him any warmth. He glanced up, giving you a hopeful look -- one that pleaded, ‘Please stay.’

You paused, then got up and peeked into 1’s throne room. There was a warm blanket in the corner of the room, folded up nicely. He was in his bedroom tonight; what he didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

“Wash the ink off your hands. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Curiously, he did as you asked, and by the time he returned, you had the blanket situated inside his little corner room, folded so that it would lay between you and the floor, but also in layers above your for warmth. You both squeezed in together, nestling in as close as possible. You laid one arm around him, where you could rest it against the back of his head, where his little hair-like poofs were flopped over. You gently stroked his head and quietly sang a lullaby -- a familiar one, which he joined in on with a near-whisper.

Lulling one another to sleep, no one knew who succumbed first. When you briefly woke in the middle of the night, with both of 6’s arms wrapped around you, you decided to make this another one of your new shared hobbies.

8:

It was so cold. You couldn’t sleep, you couldn’t achieve any sort of peace, and frankly, the temperature just made you remember how lonely you felt. You could feel the winter blues welling up inside of you and you needed an escape, so you left your bed early in the night and went walking around the Sanctuary searching for someone who might be awake.

2 and 5 weren’t in the infirmary or their makeshift lab, so you assumed they had both gone to bed early, or were on watch. You thought to go join the twins, since they and 7 weren’t at the library for the time being, but first you decided to look for your go-to stitchpunk -- 8.

It wasn’t a surprise you found him peeking out the front of the building -- not venturing outside in this chilly weather, but still trying to see if something lurked in the darkness. He wasn’t on shift, nor did he look particularly concerned -- it was simply a habit, to double-check, perhaps to test his vision in the darkness. But you were cold, and he must have been too, so you placed a gentle hand on his arm, hoping a bit late not to startle him.

He blinked down at you after his initial jerk away. “(Y/N)? What are you doi--?” He stopped, noticing how you seemed to be hugging yourself, shuddering fiercely. “You shouldn’t be out here.”

“I needed to be with someone. It’s too cold alone.”

“It’s colder out here!” 8 quickly ushered you back in, sighing when he saw how little help that did to your trembling figure. You smiled sheepishly.

“Cuddle?” you asked.

“Not here.” 8 gently held you by the wrist -- not quite by the hand -- and walked you to a warmer section of the Sanctuary, one of the rooms furthest from the open outer doors. He let go when you caught sight of a large fuzzy stocking, and the two of you managed to squeeze inside. He held you for warmth, rubbing your arms to let the friction do its work. You just allowed yourself to be cared for as you drifted away, not quite reaching your dream world, as your consciousness flickered between sleep and wakefulness.

It felt like hardly any time had passed when you felt yourself being carried somewhere. You vaguely registered the sound of a creaking door, and then you felt yourself being placed back in a bed, with sheets being pulled over you. A hand lingered on your shoulder for a moment.

You peeked one eye open as you felt the hand leave your touch for several moments, and saw that 8 had turned around and was moving back toward the door. Before he could get out of reach, you reached out and grabbed his forearm, stopping him in his tracks. He looked down at you with confused eyes.

“Stay,” you pleaded, and you felt him tense.

“I -- I shouldn’t.”

“Stay,” you repeated, a little more firmly. He glanced back and forth between you and the door and sighed, nodding.

He went to pull up a chair, but you shook your head and lifted the blanket for him. He looked at your face scrutinizingly before shaking his head and crawling into bed beside you. You smiled and wrapped your arms around his, cuddling it like it was a pillow. 8 allowed you to do so, a bit awkwardly, before finally allowing his body to relax and sink into the comfort of the bed. Sometime in the night, he moved so that his body was covering you, shielding you from the night while you remained clutching his arm.

In such a peaceful and comfortable state, enveloped in one another, you barely even registered the cold.

It happened when you left on a long-term scouting mission. You and 9 had been wanting to explore this distant town for a while, but 1 had never given you the ok to go, and while you didn't really care about that, 9 convinced you it would be better to at least try to get along. After all, you were going to spend the rest of your long lives with the same 9 individuals; you might as well try to avoid in-fighting.

So instead of outright ignoring him, you decided to pester him on the daily about whether you were allowed to leave. You waltzed in without knocking, asking five or six times, rearranged his living space, waved to a nonchalant 8, and sped out while 1 fumed. After days and days of the same routine of bugging him multiple times a day, he finally gave in, warning you to head back at the first sight of snow.

Well, the flurries began when you were just a day's travel from your destination, so there was no abiding by that.

You and 9 were snowed into one of the town's buildings for several days. You kept busy reading the fictional stories kept in the bookshelf together -- the library didn't contain very much of those. You laughed at the childrens' books and took turns reading to the other, and when it came to the YA novels, you switched back and forth at each chapter, or with each character's dialogue.

You shivered from the cold as you glanced out the window, seeing the piles of snow barricading you in this house.

"You're cold?" 9 realized, concerned. He brushed up against you, sending what felt like an electric shock through you. The bashful side of you pulled away, and 9 paused. "We could lean on another for warmth... If that's okay with you."

At first, you were too embarrassed to move closer, but you nodded slowly, and he took that as permission to move closer again. He leaned against your side, and his body warmth, however little, attracted your own to lean against him, your head tilting to rest against his shoulder.

"You're right," you responded quietly. "This is nice."

"Do you want to sit against the bed or something?" 9 asked, thinking ahead. You nodded, then separated as you jumped up to your feet. Immediately, you felt the cold biting at you again -- this time, though, not from the outside, but from within.

You scurried to the bed and hopped underneath the thick blanket. "Come on, slowpoke," you teased, as he carefully climbed up the drawers of the dresser next to the bed.

"I'm coming, I'm coming." He smiled as he crawled underneath the blanket, and like a magnet, you flung yourself against him.

“This was a good idea,” you stated, already feeling your mind start to slip as you yawned. Your body wanted to sleep, but your mind wanted to stay with 9. He seemed to know what you were thinking, because he pulled in as close as he could to you and closed his eyes, yawning as well.

“I’m glad you think so... I’ll see you in the morning.”

“See you in my dreams.”

You felt each other’s smiles grow as your bodies relaxed, knowing that both instances were sure to occur.

Chapter End Notes

{Hello everyone! Important information here.

As of now, I am choosing to mark this story as complete. While I still do love the 9 franchise and I do plan to continue writing for it, I do not have much inspiration for this story. I am so glad people have enjoyed it, but I'm concerned the longer it goes on, the more stale the content will be. I started my account on AO3 because I wanted to start a new leaf with my writing, and I don't want to fall into old habits of not updating for years or feeling pressured to write something rather than having a set goal for it in advance, like I did when I began. Now that most of the prompts I originally considered are complete, I think this is the best time to draw this to a close. This was a very fun and heartwarming story to write and I'm sure I will look back on it fondly and read through it when I need the fluff. Perhaps one day I will add a chapter, but I don't want anyone to expect it.

Other ideas I had considered included When You Show Off, When Someone Else Crushes On You, Your First (holiday) Together, When He Sees You Upset, and a variation of When You Have A Misunderstanding/When You Have A Fight/When You Upset Him/When He Upsets You, but I don't think I'll ever get around to writing them. For those of you who are interested, here are some of the ideas I would have used:

For When Someone Else Crushes On You, 6 would crush on 1's girl, 3 would crush on 2's girl, 4 would crush on 3's girl, 1 would crush on 4's girl, 2 would crush on 5's girl, 9 would crush on 6's girl, 5 would crush on 8's girl, and 8 would crush on 9's girl.

For When He Sees You Upset, 2's girl would be reading a sad story in the library and wishing she could cry like humans. 2 would come by (he only came to see you, despite his excuse that he wanted to check out the book selection) and grow concerned. You would admit it's because of the book and say that the character is all alone because everyone around it died, and he'd ask why that makes you sad because it isn't about you; you say that it is. You don't explain, but he understands the mutual theme of loneliness, and hugs you, saying you don't have to be alone, and you can just find him when you need someone. “Really?” He nods and comforts you for the rest of the time.

In the same scenario, 4's girl would have a full-on breakdown, shrieking and running off

on her own. 4 would follow you and when you're crying, he would lay a hand on your arm and try to bring you back, and try to make you feel better and hug you.

Again, thank you all for reading and I hope my writing helped you in some way. Please leave me comments letting me know what sort of 9 content you might be looking forward to reading in the future, because I WILL be posting more 9 content, even if not for this story. (Perhaps I might use OCs from this? The possibilities are limitless!) Let me know what you liked about this, in case I do continue with this or make something like it. Even if I don't post anything 9-related now, you can be certain I will once September rolls around, for 9 day. Hope to speak with you in the comments then!}

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!